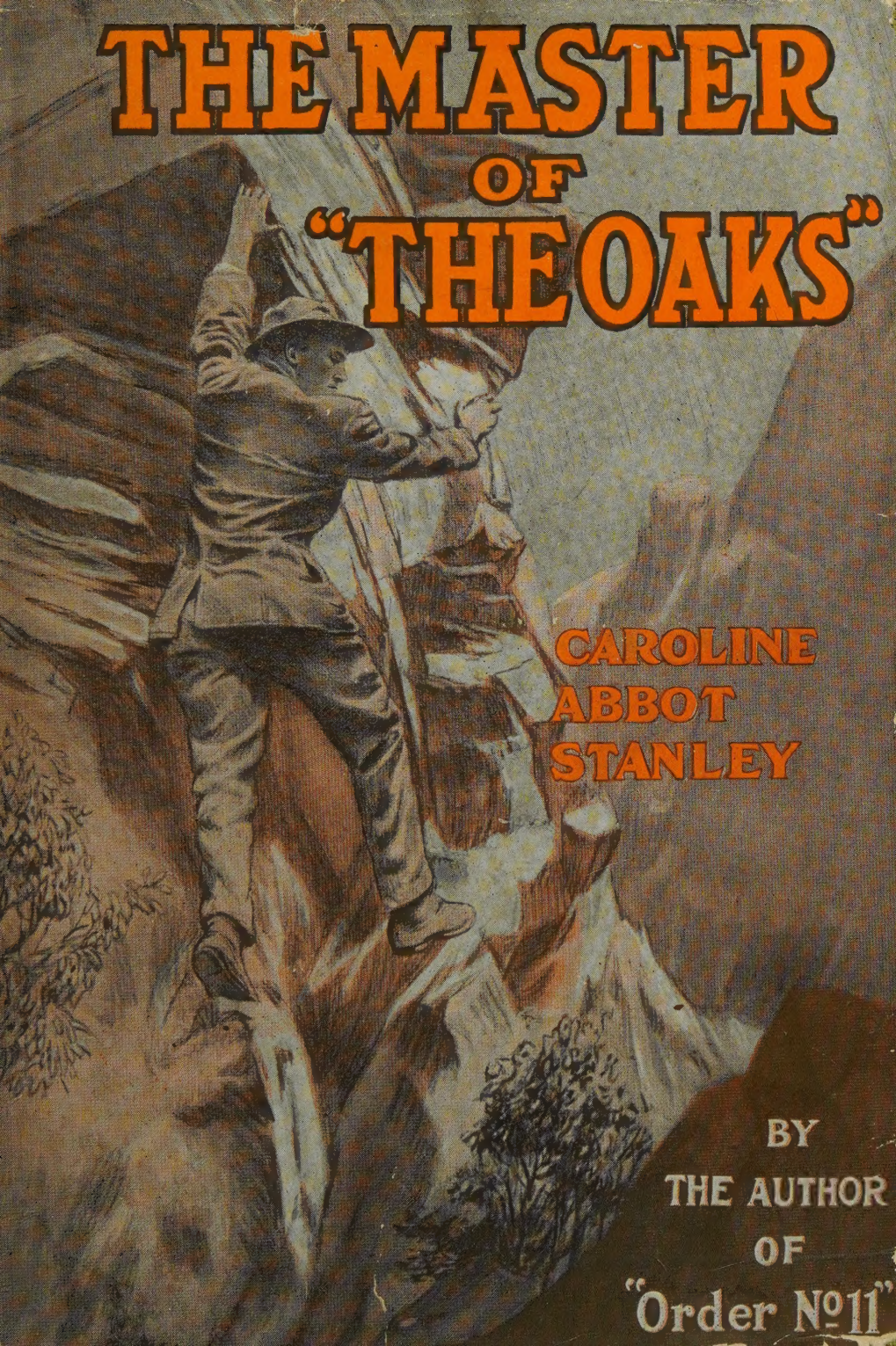
THE MASTER OF "THE OAKS"



CAROLINE ABBOT STANLEY

BY THE AUTHOR OF "Order No. 11"

BOOK NEWS says: "In Mrs. Stanley's stories we perceive throughout sincerity and loftiness of purpose, qualities not always prominent in latter day fiction."

The Master of "The Oaks"

By CAROLINE ABBOT STANLEY

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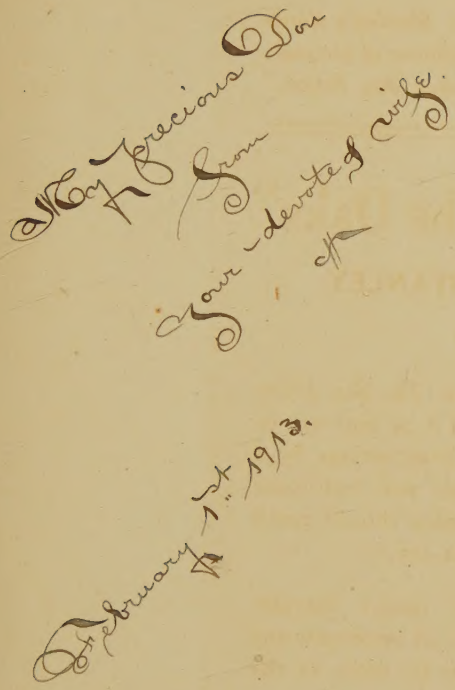

"JEAN, WILL YOU HELP ME?"

(Page 241)

The Master of "The Oaks"

A NOVEL

By

CAROLINE ABBOT STANLEY

Author of

"Order No. 11," "A Modern Madonna"

"There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice
Which is more than liberty."

NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO

Fleming H. Revell Company

LONDON AND EDINBURGH

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TO

Mrs. Hannah Trask Cornell

TO WHOSE WISE COUNSELS I OWE MUCH
AND IN WHOSE HOME BY THE BAY
THIS STORY WAS WRITTEN

CONTENTS

I.	Wrecked	9
II.	"Tinkling Spring"	23
III.	Archer McLain	30
IV.	Life at the Manse	39
V.	The Money God	50
VI.	Mrs. Debo Discourses on Men	63
VII.	On the Porch	78
VIII.	Zeb Horn	96
IX.	Colonel Judd	118
X.	The Old Bascom Place	128
XI.	Aunt Josephine Appears	138
XII.	Dr. Dabney Investigates	152
XIII.	Calvin Judd	161
XIV.	McLain Pleads	176
XV.	An Awkward Situation	185
XVI.	Tom	191
XVII.	McLain Revolts	206
XVIII.	Calvin Judd Again	219
XIX.	Smooth Sailing	237
XX.	Reconstruction	243
XXI.	The Lure of Politics	253
XXII.	The Letter	264

XXIII.	The Fight	274
XXIV.	Confession	285
XXV.	The Situation Outlined	304
XXVI.	A New Force to be Reckoned With	326
XXVII.	They also Serve	337
XXVIII.	The Steady Pull	346
XXIX.	"No. 1066"	355
XXX.	Without Bells	368
XXXI.	God's Best Gift—Work	376

I

WRECKED

THE man in the bed groaned without opening his eyes. He was in a lonely canyon as he had been many times before, and behind him—almost upon him—was a mountain lion. His only path of escape, as it seemed to him, was up the cliff, and he climbed desperately. He had almost reached the dugway above him when the beast gripped his heel and held him fast. It was the form the distorted fancy of his dreams usually took,—a lonely canyon and something in pursuit.

He tried to shake off the brute, but the lethargy of the nightmare was upon him and he could not move. He felt a savage claw upon his leg, but he was without power to stir. His very marrow was congealed and the blood in his veins turned to a sluggish flow of molten lead that weighed him down. If he could only call! But the organs of speech were palsied. Words forcing themselves through his parted lips died away in an imbecile gurgle in his throat. And the beast was clawing him down! His hold was gone—the shrub he clung to uprooted! The sound he uttered as together they rolled into the depths below rose in an inarticulate, brutish bellow. Then he awoke.

It was upon a bowl of lilacs that his eyes rested first, and the white window drapery swayed by the breeze. This was not the canyon, certainly, but the pain in his leg was so real that he raised himself on his elbow to look for the brute that had torn it. He was forced gently back upon his pillow and a pair of kindly grey eyes looked into his.

"Leg troubling you a little?"

The owner of the grey eyes turned to fill a hypodermic needle.

"Yes. Where's the beast?"

The doctor laughed. "Oh, it was a beast, was it? Well, anyway, that's better than snakes."

He was stripping up the man's sleeve, and the patient felt a sharp pin prick. "There—there! . . . Quiet now—quiet—just a minute. No, don't try to move your leg. Everything is all right—al-l right."

The sick man ceased his struggles and submitted, partly because he trusted the honest eyes, but more because an insidious numbness was stealing over him that he did not even wish to resist—some subtle elixir of life was entering his veins; he could feel it suffusing itself throughout his whole being; the world was growing roseate; a great peace fell on him; the beast was gone.

"He's off," remarked the doctor to a companion who had stood in the background. "He responds beautifully. This sleep will give his leg a rest and his brain too. When he wakes from it it will be with a clear mind, I'm thinking."

"Morphine is a great blessing to mankind, doctor," mused the elder man as he surveyed the conquered form.

"Yes—and a great curse. Nobody knows that better than a doctor. Sometimes, Dr. Dabney, I think the Creator must look down in disgust to see the base uses to which His good gifts are put—morphia, most of all."

"He made us," said the old minister, gently. "He knows our weaknesses. I am always glad to fall back on that, William. How long do you think this young man is likely to be tied here?"

"That's one of the things no man can tell. It was a beautiful fracture, and is likely to heal by the first intention. But, you see, in these cases so much depends upon the patient's previous life. This young fellow looks as if he had good clean blood in his veins, but whether he has or not remains to be seen. At the very best he

is likely to be here a good many weeks. You certainly undertook a large contract, doctor, when you opened your house to the victims of this wreck."

"As a man and a Christian I couldn't have done less," said Dr. Dabney, simply. "It was only my cup of cold water."

"You'll have a chance to extend several cups, I'm afraid, before this young fellow gets through. The others will be off your hands soon, I hope. Where's Jean?"

"Out in the yard with Mrs. Gilmore's baby getting a breath of fresh air. It is about the first time she has left her 'ward,' as you call it. I think she is proving a very capable nurse. Her patients are loud in her praise, at any rate."

"She is one of a thousand," declared Dr. Llewellyn, with professional enthusiasm. "A trained nurse could hardly have done better. Why, she administered chloroform to Mrs. Nellis for that dislocation as steadily as a doctor. I was a little afraid to have her do it—I shouldn't have called on her if I had had anybody else—but I hardly thought I could trust your sister."

"Oh, no!—no! Not in an emergency."

"So I thought. But Jean—why, Dr. Dabney, that girl has nerve and decision and determination enough for three women. I feel as if I really never knew her until you started this hospital here. Where did she get all these traits?"

"Her mother was not lacking in determination and decision of character," replied the minister, thoughtfully, ignoring the implication that they had not come through the paternal line, "nor in nerve, I suppose, though I don't know that that was ever tested except in the matter of her marrying me. That possibly required all the stern virtues that you say you have observed in Genevieve. It certainly precipitated enough of a storm upon her head. Are you acquainted with my sister-in-law, Mrs. Alexander?"

Dr. Llewellyn chuckled.

"Enough so to guess at the strength of her opposition if she should take it into her head to oppose."

"She took it into her head to oppose most decidedly. In fact, her opposition has never ceased, though my poor Mary has been beyond the reach of it for many long years."

"She can't forget it, eh?"

"She has never left me in doubt that she considers her sister's marriage to me a calamity. For a city girl of wealth and family to throw herself away upon a country parson seemed to her—and still seems—the direst of misfortunes. I am not sure but she is right—and still"—his quizzical tone softened and he took off his glasses and rubbed them absently—"we were very happy. I think we would always have been had she lived. Genevieve is very like her, doctor. I've watched it closely. She too, I think, would find it possible to make great sacrifice for one she loved, and even to brave opposition, as her mother did. I trust"—he shook his head slowly—"I trust the occasion may never arise."

"She is finding it possible to make great sacrifice for strangers at present," remarked the doctor, drily. "I don't believe she has slept five hours in twenty-four in the whole week since these people landed here; and this breath of fresh air is the first I've heard of. Why don't these women and children go home? They are able to travel and I've told them so. It's an outrage—on you, and Jean, and Aunt Phyllis. This is no hotel."

"They will go in good time, William. I have urged them to stay until they have recovered from the shock of this accident. A railroad wreck is a nerve-racking thing. Mrs. Gilmore now is greatly shaken. It seems hard for her to regain her poise."

"Yes, and she will take two months in the process if you continue to provide her with cool, airy quarters, a nurse for her children, and such fried chicken as Aunt

Phyllis can cook! I want you people to save yourselves for the nursing of this young man. He can't go."

"They're thinning out, William. Mrs. Nellis goes to-morrow. Her husband comes for her to-day. The Gilmores will go in a few days, I think."

"I'll step in and see Mrs. Nellis before I go," said the doctor, rising. "Can little Ephraim sit with the patient? There is a bare possibility that he may be nauseated by this morphia, and he'd better have somebody with him."

"Ephraim has gone to the station with a telegram. I'll call Je——"

"Don't call Jean! Let her stay downstairs as long as she will. Perhaps Miss Lavinia could come up for a short time."

"I'll speak to her," said the minister, a little doubtfully.

"Tell her there's no responsibility. She can bring her sewing if she wishes. I only want her to sit by him while he sleeps. You needn't say anything about nausea. Quite likely he will not have it."

When Dr. Dabney returned from delivering the message the physician remarked, "I'd rather like to be here when he comes out of this sleep, but I have to go down the road to see old Mrs. Dunklin. She's down with lumbago again. Ah, good-morning, Miss Lavinia. How are you to-day?"

"Pretty well, thank you, doctor," fluttered Miss Lavinia, looking nervously toward the bed. "You think I can——"

"Certainly! There's nothing to do. I know of nobody that can do that better in a sick room than you can—nobody."

His tone was so deferential and gallant that Miss Lavinia raised a deprecating hand. "Oh, no, no, doctor! Even Jean, inexperienced as she is, could do it better."

"Indeed she couldn't," he assured her warmly. "You see, it is only to have somebody here in case he wakes—and something pleasant for him to look at when he does.

I'll step in, Dr. Dabney, on my way back from Mrs. Dunklin's. Good-morning, Miss Lavinia."

Left to herself with the sick man, Miss Lavinia Dabney, a sweet-faced gentlewoman of fifty or more, with stooping shoulders and an irresolute mouth, sat down in a rocker somewhat removed from the bed, and nervously smoothed her white apron. The doctor's compliment, taken at a trifle more than its face value, had given her some confidence, and still she was afraid to stir lest she should precipitate the calamity of an awakening. But the man slept on the deep sleep of the narcotic.

Emboldened by his insensibility to sights and sounds, and feeling the impossibility of settling herself to so commonplace a thing as darning in this mysterious presence, Miss Lavinia, after sitting at a distance for what seemed to be hours, lifted her chair cautiously and advanced upon the enemy, putting on her glasses for better inspection. It was the first time she had really had a good look at him, and she was not devoid of what some persons consider the most salient characteristic of her sex.

What she saw was a handsome, boyish face under a mass of slightly waving brown hair cropped close at the sides. Even a week's growth of beard could not hide the firm lines of the mouth and a chin chiselled like a cameo. The forehead, partly hidden by a bandage, was high and broad, but between the brows were two tiny deep-set lines, as though the young man had a habit of contracting them.

"Wrinkles! That's strange! It couldn't be care, at his age," mused Miss Lavinia, who prided herself upon being something of a physiognomist. "I don't believe he can be more than twenty-four—just Henry's age when——" A softly breathed sigh filled out the sentence, and the tears welled in Miss Lavinia's eyes, as they did sometimes even yet after the lapse of thirty

odd years at the thought of her young lover and his untimely end. "I wonder if he has a wife, poor fellow! or—a sweetheart."

Miss Lavinia's romance, which was a hidden one, seldom referred to but much dwelt on in a gentle, reminiscent spirit of submission, made her very tender toward lovers.

A long time she sat there weaving romances about this youth,—romances in which, strangely enough, she and Henry somehow had a part. . . . Suppose—suppose Henry had not died. Suppose that this were he come back to her from that far-off land to which he journeyed in such hope—to return no more. Miss Lavinia pressed a withered hand to her heart, which fluttered with the vehemence of eighteen. . . . Or, granting that these were too wild and foolish fancies to be given place in mortal brain, suppose it had been given to her to sit beside him in his illness thus; to minister to him; to hold his hand. Miss Lavinia laid her little withered, blue-veined hand upon the passive one resting on the white counterpane. The sick man stirred slightly at the touch, and she hastily slipped her fingers to his pulse,—a perfectly impersonal and correct position for a nurse.

But even this semi-professional contact and the sight of the youthful face stirred her to thoughts sweet and tender and innocent, but which not for worlds would she have voiced. It was the maternal that was speaking now. . . . Suppose . . . suppose this were her son (she looked around her with startled glance, fearing lest some one might hear the unspoken thought)—it might well be—it was thirty years since Henry died. How proud, how happy she would be, how blest, to have a boy like this as a support for her declining years! True, Jean was like a daughter to her, and she had tried to be a mother to her, but to have a son—her own—her very own!

"My son!" she murmured in sweet ecstasy, bending toward him. "My son! My son!"

A sudden and prosaic end came to Miss Lavinia's dreams. The scissors resting in her well-starched lap had during this reverie been slowly but steadily travelling down an inclined plane. They fell now with a clang that reached even the dulled senses of the sleeper. He opened his eyes and looked about him without moving. Apparently he was alone, for by this time Miss Lavinia was on the floor struggling with a concatenation of events.

Startled by the falling of her shears she had in her excitement pushed her chair against the table and overturned the toppling bowl of lilacs, precipitating a stream on the floor and the table cover, seeing which, Miss Lavinia promptly abandoned her new-found rôle of nurse and phantom wife and mother, and found the more accustomed one of thrifty housewife at the front. Righting the lilacs in the vase, she fell on her knees, and with a towel fortunately at hand was mopping up its spilled contents. Seeing nothing of this and supposing he was alone, the man mechanically took in such of his surroundings as were within his range of vision,—walls with green ivy climbing over a white ground; a white iron bed with spotless coverings; a glimpse of cool matting with woven rugs of white and green. He turned his head slightly to follow the line of the rug, and came upon the lilacs and the white drapery of the window blowing softly. . . . He had seen those before. . . . Where—had he—seen those lilacs?

As he lay idly speculating on this a little woman rose from the floor, nervous and flurried, almost at his side, and cast an anxious look at him. He was apparently in a deep sleep, seeing which Miss Lavinia turned her attention to the table cover and the lilacs. Perceiving from one corner of his eye that her back was toward him he watched her movements with interest. He certainly had never seen her before, but perhaps she might furnish him

the clue. He needed it certainly, for through the open window there fell upon his city ears strange, unaccustomed country sounds,—a distant cow-bell's tinkle; the baying of hounds a great way off; the loud cackle of a hen triumphant; and the noisy, strident "Pot-*rack!* pot-*rack!*" of a flock of guineas.

The table restored to its normal state, Miss Lavinia turned once more to her sleeping patient. He was watching her with amused, wide-open eyes, which startled her so that she dropped her cloth and beat a precipitate retreat.

"Jean," he heard her call in a low voice, apparently down a well, "*Oh,* Jean!"

"What is it, Aunt Lavinia?"

"I—I think—he is going to wake!"

"Well! Let him wake." It was a rich, full voice and had a note of laughter in it that was infectious.

"But—I don't know what to say to him."

"Don't say anything. Let him say it."

"Honey,"—the voice was almost pleading—"I think you had better come. I—I have had an accident, and I am very much perturbed."

"*All-l* right, auntie. I'll be there in a minute."

He heard faint footsteps going down the stairs and then more vigorous ones ascending, and in a moment the doorway framed the picture of a wholesome, bright-faced young girl in a house dress of pink gingham, and a baby's arms around her neck. The vision seemed to fit in with the neat, pleasant room.

She smiled frankly into his wide-open eyes.

"Good-morning. Aunt Lavinia thinks you are going to wake."

"I am afraid I am. Is it so reprehensible?"

"On the contrary, I should say it was most commendable."

She seated herself in the vacated chair and set the baby on her knee. "After a week's sleep I think a man

might be permitted to wake without criticism, don't you?"

"A week! Have I been here a week?"

"You have," she told him, composedly. "Just one week to-day."

"Where am I? Whose house is this? And how did I come to be here?"

"Aren't there a few more things you would like to know all at the same time? Don't hesitate to ask questions. I find that a few people have to be 'shown' who are not from Missouri. And you really are in Missouri, and it seems to be getting into your system."

He noticed now that her mocking eyes were brown and that the mass of hair crowning her well-shaped head was of the same colour with a glint of gold in it where the sun touched it.

"Yes," she continued, "you really are in Missouri; in the home of Dr. Dabney, my father, pastor of the Presbyterian Church; and you were brought here on a shutter. I believe that answers your questions in their proper order. Don't you remember anything about the wreck?"

"The wreck?" He closed his eyes in thought, to open them almost immediately. "Was it a wreck? I remember a grating noise and then a crash that threw me out of my seat. I think I must have been struck senseless, for I can't seem to recall anything else except a great noise and screaming. . . . And it was a wreck?"

"It certainly was a wreck. No doubt of it at all."

"And that is why I am here?"

"Yes. Father had some of the injured brought here (ours happened to be about the nearest house) until they could communicate with their friends or go on their journey after the road was open. They are nearly all gone now. This is our youngest. Her mother was injured slightly—very slightly, Dr. Llewellyn says. Isn't she a dear?"

She held up the baby, who crowed and threw out her hands in entrancing baby fashion.

"So far as I am a judge I should say she was—a dear." But he was not looking at the baby.

"Would you mind telling me," he said after a pause during which she played "Creep, mousie" with the child, eliciting shrieks of delight, "what is the matter with my leg? I can't seem to move it."

She thought a moment before she answered him. Then, looking into his clear eyes in which there was no sign of fever or delirium, she decided that the thing to do was to tell him the truth.

"It was broken in the wreck—just above the ankle. It is what Dr. Llewellyn calls a 'beautiful fracture,' healing by—or is it *with?*—no, I think it is *by*—healing by the 'first intention,' whatever that is. I always supposed that sober second thoughts were best, but it seems not—in the case of fractures. It really is doing finely, the doctor says, and there is not the least occasion for alarm. You have only to be patient and wait. And you are in good hands."

"I can see that!"

"I mean that Dr. Llewellyn is an excellent physician and you need not worry. Now doesn't it make you feel better to know the truth?"

She really was in doubt as to whether she ought to have told him so much and wanted to be reassured.

"It certainly does. I was afraid I was paralyzed."

"No, indeed. It is just an ordinary fracture. Dr. Llewellyn told me to use my judgment about how much to tell you when you woke, and you seemed so clear-headed and rational I thought it was best to tell you the truth. I think that is the wisest way to do about everything, don't you?—if you can."

"Yes," he repeated, rather lifelessly, "if you can."

"I am afraid I am tiring you," she said quickly, with a motion to rise.

"No, no!" he protested, eagerly. "Don't go! I want to ask what made me sleep a week if the leg is doing all right."

"I suppose it was the blow on your head. The doctor says so. He was a little doubtful about that, but he said if you woke with a clear mind you would be 'out of the woods,' to use his exact expression."

The young man put his hand to his head, letting it slip down the side of his face.

"Whew! this beard is—could I get at a barber around here?"

"Hardly! We don't live in a barberous community. There! I didn't mean to inflict a pun on a defenceless man, but it slipped out 'unbeknownst,' as Aunt Phyllis would say."

"Do you know what the Autocrat says about a pun?" he demanded in mock severity.

"Yes," she flashed. "That 'it doesn't usually justify a blow in return.'" They both laughed to think she was ready for him. It pleased and surprised him that he did not have to explain to this country girl who the Autocrat was. "Well, I counted on your helplessness. But really," returning to the barber, "you know this isn't the city, and in the country every man is the architect of his own beard. Still—I don't know—perhaps——"

She went to the door then, the baby clinging to her neck, and called:

"Little Ephrum!"

A black giant appeared noiselessly as if at the clap of a geni's hands. The man was in reality there with a telegram, and was in slippers, ready for the sick room. He had been there many times before in the last week, but the sick man did not know that. There seemed something positively uncanny in his instant and noiseless appearance. He seemed like one of the eunuchs of the Arabian Nights.

"Yaas'm," he said.

"Little Ephrum, this gentleman, Mr.——" She looked toward the patient.

"McLain," he smiled,—"Archer McLain."

"Thank you. Mr. McLain feels the need of a shave. Could you give him one?"

The negro shook his head doubtfully. "I dunno, Miss Jean, whether I darst to or no."

"You have done it."

"Yaas'm, I shaved yo' paw when he was gittin' up fum do fever. An' I done shave Uncle Adam when he was daid,—an' he was layin' down too, jes' lak dis gentleman. Maybe——"

"You are excused, Ephraim," came a decided voice from the bed; "if Miss——"

"Dabney. Jean Dabney," laughed the girl.

"——if Miss Dabney will excuse my appearance."

"Oh, don't worry about that! You do seem to need a shave, but appearances are often deceitful. That's all, little Ephrum. . . . Give me the telegram."

The man in the bed looked after the retreating form of the dusky giant, a quizzical smile on his lips.

"I suppose you are laughing at my barber."

"No. I was only wondering how large 'big Ephraim' might be."

The laugh that rang out then was like the carolling of a bird, spontaneous and bubbling over.

"I wish you could see 'big Ephraim'! He is about as tall as I am and looks like a withered potato. You see, this one was named for his father and was called 'little Ephraim' to distinguish them. The name has stuck to him, though he has really outgrown it. I believe he is six feet two. I can imagine how it strikes you. But I really must take this telegram to Mrs. Nellis."

At the door she paused, and he remembered her long afterwards as she stood there, the child's face pressed close to hers, its chubby arms encircling her neck—the

most becoming necklace a woman can wear, somebody has said.

"Wouldn't you like something to eat after your long fast?"

"Why, yes." A zest in life and its appetites was rapidly coming back to him. "I believe I should."

"How about broiled chicken on toast?"

"That sounds good to me!"

"Well, you can't have it—of *course!* I only asked to test your appetite. But maybe I'll bring you some chicken broth—if you are good."

When she was gone he lay quite still, thinking of the madonna picture she had made in the white frame of the doorway, and marvelling at her naturalness and ease of manner. If he had been her brother or her grandfather she could not have shown less self-consciousness in meeting him, a stranger. . . . How she had caught him up on the Autocrat! He smiled as he thought of it, and again at the remembrance of her laugh. Then his eyes went back to the wall-paper and the ivy. It climbed and climbed in such a senseless way, for it never seemed to get anywhere.

He closed his eyes at last to shut it out.

II

"TINKLING SPRING"

THE community into which Archer McLain had been so unceremoniously flung by a railroad wreck, and to which he seemed likely to be chained by a broken leg, rejoiced in the rather musical name of the "Tinkling Spring neighbourhood."

It took its name of course from the church, for the church antedated the post-office by a good many years, having been organized away back in the thirties, when a post-office was a luxury and a place of worship a necessity. And small wonder when the Gospel was so nearly free and letters twenty-five cents apiece, paid on delivery.

The Tinkling Spring Church as it stands to-day is an evolution. The germ from which it sprang was built of logs hewed and laid by sturdy pioneers who came, some of them, twenty miles—came joyfully too, for this was when log-rolling was in its best estate—to build a house where they might sing the Lord's songs in a strange land. Over the primitive structure, they raised that day away back in the century's youth the blue banner of their Scotch-Irish ancestors, and there it floats to-day; for though generation after generation of the fathers have fallen asleep, there has always been somebody left to hold up the banner.

The name of that rural sanctuary was not, as might readily be supposed, derived from some cooling spring that bubbled in the vicinity, but from a homesick fealty of the new settlers for the old home church in the Shenandoah Valley, where springs do abound. "Tink-

ling Spring" it had been in the hill country of Virginia, and "Tinkling Spring" it became in the lowlands of Missouri, without suspicion of humour marring the joy of the christening. Somehow the name seemed to bring them nearer to the Old Dominion, which was the mother of some of them and the grandmother of the rest.

The Tinkling Spring Church was "old School," and by that token one would suppose sufficiently strict; but in the neighbourhood at the time of its organization were several families of Scotch "Seceders," who by inheritance held in low esteem Mr. Watts and his man-made hymns, —they having long cherished the conviction that no words could be a vehicle of divine praise equal to the words of Scripture itself.

It is difficult for us to understand the affection of the Scots for their metrical psalms, but as one writer has said of this: "Affection is not to be explained." They certainly cleaved to them in the Tinkling Spring neighbourhood at that date.

But whatever division of opinion there was at Tinkling Spring about metrical psalms there was none at all about the advisability of securing the "Seceders," so it was agreed that at each public service one of the hymns should be from Rous's Version, as it was called. Imagine then the grizzled fathers and godly mothers in this frontier Israel singing in all gravity:

"I fainted had, unless that I
Believéd had to see
The Lord's own goodness in the land
Of them that living be.

"For he in his pavilion shall
Me hide in evil days;
In secret of his tent me bide
And on a rock me raise."

Or asking with united breath the somewhat enigmatical question:

"What profit is there in my blood,
When I go down to pit?
Shall unto thee the dust give praise?
The truth declare shall it?"

Certainly the fathers, however superior to us, their children, in piety and religious zeal,—*were* deficient in a sense of humour. The conclusion is inevitable when one (even with the most reverent intent) essays to read the metrical versions of early times.

But if it was not very smooth-flowing poetry it served its purpose in the new church, for it secured the support of several families—which was a good deal at this juncture—and in a few years, having gained their point, they were singing Watts and Toplady with the rest, and Mr. Rous and his metrical version were relegated to the shelf. What a lot of human nature there is in us—even when we are godly "Seceders"!

The Tinkling Spring Church thrived as an oak grows strong—from the buffeting of the winds. Its first minister rode through an unbroken forest a distance of fifty miles from a river port once a month, and the brethren drove to hear him over roads yet to be made, it almost seemed.

Nor were these the only struggles they passed through. Scotch-Irish Presbyterianism is a robust kind of Christianity. The fathers held strong opinions and promulgated them from the shoulder; but if they fought for their convictions it was because they *were* convictions and not conjectures. The religious thinking of the community was in deep ruts. Conservatism and respect for precedent were as deeply imbedded in the heart of Tinkling Spring as in the soul of an English peer.

It was a self-absorbed community, as most country neighbourhoods are, perhaps. A timely rain or an untimely frost was more to them than the great principles of conservation; and the question: What shall we do

with the Hungarian human hordes pouring through Castle Garden? a far less momentous one than: How shall we rid ourselves of the Hessian fly?

There were people who wondered that a man of Dr. Dabney's scholarship could be content to bury his talents in a country church,—but the good doctor had given scant encouragement to the expression of these views. Like most youthful divines he had had his vision of wide fields of influence and growing city congregations, but it faded in time; for to a scholarly mind seclusion has its charms, and then as the years went by he came to see that it was more the quality of the tillage than the breadth of the field that counted.

When love came to him and with all love's inconsistency came through a high-born city girl instead of a country maiden of his own flock, the enticement of wider fields came back to him, but he had come to feel that his people needed him and that he needed them, and he went to Mary Charlton and laid at her feet a man's love and—an obscure country life, telling her that he was bound to it by a love passing the love of woman. It did not sound exactly complimentary, but somehow she liked him the better for it, and the result was that one day he bore this same Mary Charlton of St. Louis to his country home, where they set up their household gods with great joy and content. Miss Charlton's family was far from accepting the simple life for her with the complacency which she manifested. She was the youngest daughter of an old and wealthy house, and her family had expected her to form a brilliant alliance. That it should eventuate in nothing more than a happy marriage was extremely disappointing.

They had but a brief life together. When her baby girl was three days old that brave, undaunted spirit that had defied her family faced the inevitable, and smiling up indomitably into her husband's eyes to the last, went out into another unknown country.

There are few things in this life more pitiful than a young father suddenly left alone with a new-born infant in his arms. To be "smitten with the anguish of inexorable separation," as Dr. Van Dyke has so touchingly phrased it, and at the same moment to have thrust upon him a responsibility for which he is and must ever be inadequate,—this is hard indeed. Poor William Dabney, walking the floor with this little mite of humanity pressed close to his aching breast, felt it to be all of this. And yet—she was his own, his very own, and—Mary's. From that time to the present she had lain on his heart, a precious burden. For whoever, be it man or woman, becomes father and mother both to a little child is bound to it thereafter by a double cord.

Mrs. Alexander, Dr. Dabney's sister-in-law, had written at once to say that while she could never forget her sister's disregard of her family's wishes, she was willing to forgive and to do her duty. He might look for her the next week to take the baby home with her. But she must stipulate that she should have entire control of it, for she wished to rear the child as a Charlton.

To this the young minister made haste to reply by telegram:

"Don't come. I shall keep the child."

Then he and Miss Lavinia, who knew no more about infant culture than the Babes in the Wood, set themselves to their onerous task, calling to their assistance one who proved a tower of strength—Drusilla Debo. Mrs. Debo came from down on Goose Creek, which to the initiated settles her social status. But if "the creek" never produced any other good thing it should be remembered with gratitude because it gave to the world a Drusilla. What Dr. Dabney and his timid, irresolute maiden sister would have done without her at this juncture they never dared to contemplate. The ease with which she manipu-

lated the tremendous responsibility done up in swaddling clothes, and the infallibility with which she could trace a wail to its source and apply a specific, caused the wondering minister to retire to his study many times, there to reflect upon the inadequacy of the higher learning as a preparation for the emergencies of life.

Mrs. Alexander came—with a nurse and a travelling outfit for the baby. She was not the type of woman to be stopped by a telegram. She returned empty-handed after a fierce-fought battle.

"Lavinia Dabney is no suitable person to bring up a child," was her argument. "She is an old maid!"

Mrs. Alexander was one of those who conceive that maternity bestows upon women some occult governing skill unattainable by the childless, regardless of the fact that the mother of ten often proves herself unfit to be the trainer of one; and unaware in her blindness that the dear Lord sometimes gives to one the child, and to another, as compensation, perhaps, the maternal instinct.

"My sister will give this child tender love and material care," returned the young minister, "and by God's help I will do the rest. It is settled, Mrs. Alexander."

Then, in answer to the accusation that her sister's child was to be kept from her, "Not at all. Should you desire at any time to visit my little daughter my home is always open to you."

Mrs. Alexander, who had proffered her services in the first place somewhat with the air of a martyr, but found her desire for the infant strengthening with each round of the contest, did not avail herself of this invitation until her niece was four years old, at which time she came up for a week's visit, bringing with her her son Tom, three years older than the little Genevieve, and a living refutation of his mother's theory that maternity confers governing power.

A week is a short time, but it was long enough for the visitor to weight Miss Lavinia down with the principles

of child-training suitable for this descendant of the Charltons. After one of these dissertations, which left Miss Lavinia browbeaten and depressed, Mrs. Alexander turned to her small niece with some directions as to what she must and must not do. The child, dimly conscious that Aunt Lavinia, whom she adored, was on trial and the case going against her, stepped between her and the prosecutor. Planting herself before her maternal aunt and looking her square in the eye, her hands behind her back, she announced succinctly and with something of her father's quiet dignity:

"My papa is the bosst of me!"

Miss Lavinia was overcome with shame at this immediate proof of her incapacity to rear a child; but strange to say, it delighted Mrs. Alexander, who saw in it, as she said afterwards, such a flash of the Charlton spirit that she took her niece to her heart then and there, and proved it by spending a month each year thereafter in her brother-in-law's home, choosing naturally that part of the year when it was desirable to be out of the city. Her visits came to be looked forward to as one of the discomforts of the heated term.

But if the family were not fond of Mrs. Alexander they were of Tom, who, in spite of being an overindulged child, was a lovable one, much like his father, who was dead. It became the custom in time for the boy to spend the whole summer at his Uncle Dabney's. In this way the two children grew up together on terms of the greatest intimacy and affection, for a vigorous, childish correspondence was kept up between them, and Tom was duly informed when a new calf or a litter of kittens was added to the family fold. His visits became fewer as his years advanced, or rather shorter, for in the thin-skinned period of adolescence he threw off the yoke of his mother's nagging and would come only when she could not. This year he was abroad.

III

ARCHER McLAIN

"BUT, doctor, I can't inflict myself upon these people for an indefinite period of time! It is an outrage upon hospitality."

"I don't see how you can help doing it just at present," remarked Dr. Llewellyn, drily. "I won't be responsible for that leg of yours if you use it before I say so—now that's flat! I am trying to bring you out of this without a limp, young man, and I'll do it, I think, if you will follow my directions. But you can't stir out of this bed until I say the word."

Dr. Llewellyn had hurried back from his reluctant ministrations upon old Mrs. Dunklin in order that he might observe developments in this more interesting case. He had listened with close attention to Genevieve Dabney's account of all that had transpired in his absence, for the condition in which the patient would awake from his delirium had been a matter of gravest concern to him. There had been concussion, and accompanying this was always the fear of a pressure on the brain.

This danger now seemed to have been averted. He was confirmed in this belief not only by Jean's report but by his own observation. He had sat for an hour or more talking with the patient on a variety of subjects, and found his mind absolutely unclouded. Even his reluctance to inflict himself in his helplessness upon strangers was evidence of normality,—a reluctance, by the way, which did not abate under the doctor's emphatic words. He returned to the subject.

"Well, isn't there a hospital, or hotel, or something that I can be taken to?"

"Hotels don't spring up at every crossroads in the country, my boy; and you wouldn't find a hospital short of St. Louis. They are as scarce around these parts as—barbers."

He grinned. Evidently he had heard the story of Jean's tonsorial efforts in the patient's behalf.

McLain laughed—a natural, boyish laugh that did the doctor's professional heart good.

"That leaves nothing more to be said, certainly. You can not blame me, doctor, for declining the services of the giant? I thought I'd better take my chances with a French beard—or a Safety. By the way, I suppose my portmanteau was lost in the shuffle?"

"No. Your portmanteau is here. We found one marked A. McL., and we identified you as its probable owner by a letter in your pocket."

"A letter? Let me see it," said the young man, quickly.

"I should have said an envelope, for that was all there was. We looked to see if we could find somebody to communicate with. But the letter was gone, so there was no chance to do so."

It seemed to Dr. Llewellyn, who was watching him closely, that an expression of relief flitted over the young man's face; but it was fleeting if it was there at all, and the next question was a natural one under the circumstances.

"My trunk was lost, of course?"

"No, your trunk is here too. Your check secured that, though in a slightly demoralized condition. You were booked for Chicago, I believe."

"Yes."

He did not say whether the great metropolis was his ultimate destination, and Dr. Llewellyn, who had really made this observation for the purpose of opening up the

subject, reflected with some amusement that as many railroad lines led out of Chicago as into it. But he did not pursue the subject. It was no part of his business to quiz a patient except pathologically. He did take it upon himself, however, to offer some advice.

"You carry a good deal of money, young man. Drafts are safer. If it had been somebody else than Dr. Dabney that rifled your pockets you might not have come off so well. . . . Oh, yes, it is all right as it is. The doctor put it safely away awaiting your order."

The young man laughed light-heartedly. "I don't see but you people have taken fairly good care of my case. I wake to find my wounds dressed, my leg in plaster, my baggage attended to, my money safely deposited, and even the eunuch who comes when I clap my hands. I don't see that Aladdin's lamp could have done much more—up to the present time."

Dr. Llewellyn laughed. "'Eunuch' is good."

"Well, doesn't he look it? Yes, I think it was rather clever of me to go off for a week's sleep while you were getting things in shape for me. But seriously, doctor, I don't want to make myself more of a burden upon these good people than is necessary. If I can't be moved you can get me a nurse, can't you? I must have a nurse."

"Yes, you ought to have a nurse. I've been out looking for one this morning. That is what detained me. I think I have secured her now; not just the kind you would like, perhaps, white uniform and cap and all the city fol-de-rol, but a good capable woman who knows her business and will nurse you as your mother would. And, by the way, Mr. McLain, you will not need professional nursing very long. Dr. Dabney wishes me to ask if there is anybody you would like to have sent for—your mother or sister or—no, I hardly think you have a wife."

The young man did not answer jovially as the doctor

expected, but gravely. "No, I have no wife. I never had a sister, and my mother is not living."

His face was so unsmiling that the doctor felt constrained to apologize, he hardly knew for what, unless it were a reference to a bereavement that he could by no means know about.

"Your father, perhaps?"

"My father died when I was a child."

"And there is no one else that you would wish to have notified?"

"No. I think not. I shall want to communicate with my attorney later, but if my money is safe there is no need to do that at present. I can attend to it when I am up."

"But you will bring action against the railroad, won't you?"

"Possibly. But there will be time enough for that." Then as if dismissing the subject he said brightly, "Doctor, I wish you would tell me something about the good Samaritans that have taken me in. Who are they?"

"The salt of the earth," answered Dr. Llewellyn, promptly. "You might go the length and breadth of this land and fail to run across a finer man and truer gentleman than Dr. Dabney."

"He is a minister, his daughter tells me."

"Yes. A country parson. He has married these people, baptized their children, and buried their dead for forty years. He is deep-rooted as an oak. His church is devoted to him beyond anything I have ever seen elsewhere. People who have moved away send for him from neighbouring counties to marry them because he married their mothers or buried their fathers. He is bound to this neighbourhood by a hundred cords of that kind. I don't suppose the thought of a change of ministers has ever entered their heads since he preached his installation sermon."

"His parish must be different from most modern ones."

"Well, it is. This is a secluded, conservative neighbourhood where people go on as their fathers did and don't care much for change or new-fangled things. They keep the same preacher and the same doctor and the same wives as long as they live.

"You see, they are somewhat aside from the lines of travel—a little off the beaten track, as you may say, but they don't mind that—in fact, they don't know it. But they are good people, Mr. McLain; they are good people—a God-fearing, self-respecting, honest, industrious farming community—that's what they are. . . . No, I am not exactly one of them now, but I class myself with them because this was my early home and I have never got away from my affection for it. I can see its limitations, of course, but I love it. No, sir, I live in the town of Putney—some distance away—but near enough for me to have considerable practice down in the old neighbourhood. You see, my father doctored their fathers, and they stick by the name."

"If you do as well by them as you have done by me I can't blame them."

The doctor bowed his acknowledgments, with a wave of his hand, and then returned to the more interesting subject of the Dabneys.

"Yes, sir, the old doctor is as fine a specimen of a Christian gentleman as I have ever come across. If he has ever swerved from the path of rectitude in the course of a long life I've never heard of it. The tradition is that he was never tempted—but then you can't diagnose a man's temptations! It certainly is his meat and drink to do the Lord's will and serve his fellowmen. And, by the way, he considers it a privilege to be able to serve you in this emergency. So just dismiss from your mind all fear that you are intruding. He knows that you are likely to be here some time, and he

bids me assure you that his home is as open to you as your own father's would be."

"That's very kind of him. I certainly appreciate it."

"He means every word of it. And whatever the doctor proposes, Miss Lavinia, his sister and housekeeper, disposes."

"Miss Lavinia? Is she the little lady who was so afraid of me?"

"Yes." The doctor chuckled again. He had heard a humorous account of this, too, from Jean. "Miss Lavinia is a good little soul—horizon a trifle restricted, but clear vision so far as pickles and plum puddings go—and some people think that is as far as a woman needs to see. I have wondered sometimes that Miss Lavinia doesn't absorb something from Dr. Dabney and Jean, but, by Jove! I believe the kind of women that are housekeepers and nothing but housekeepers are supplied by nature with a kind of moral oil that keeps their plumage glossy and makes every outside interest slip off their backs. Well,—Miss Lavinia is a housekeeper—but good as gold so far as she goes."

"Isn't there a Mrs. Dabney?"

"No. She died years ago when Jean was an infant. The doctor has never married again."

"'Jean,' as you call her, is the young lady I saw in here?"

"Yes. Dr. Dabney's only child."

"It doesn't strike me that her horizon would be specially restricted."

"Not Jean's! She is her father's own child, and her mother's too. Her mother was one of the St. Louis Charltons, and a mighty fine woman. Her family felt that she was throwing herself away on an obscure country minister, but she was not. The Dabneys were of as good blood as the Charltons. Better, perhaps, for they go back to the Huguenot D'Aubignes. It was money

they lacked, but that is a fatal lack in the eyes of some people. It changes the complexion of blood. The Charltons couldn't see anything blue in the Dabney blood except the colour of the doctor's Presbyterianism and his ultramarine prospects."

"And still she married him?"

"Oh, yes, she married him. You see, her blood had some rather spirited red in it as well as blue. And I imagine it would have turned out all right if she had lived. Since her death naturally the relation between Jean and her father has been very close. She has had him for a companion all her life. He has implanted his ideas in her mind and nurtured them. He has directed her reading and her thinking; he has always made a practice of talking with her about the books she reads; and he has interested her in the great things of life that he himself is interested in—and the result is that her horizon isn't bounded by pickles and plum puddings—not by a long shot! The doctor has been very unselfish about her too. He has given her excellent school opportunities and she has been quick to take advantage of them. But she hasn't lost her head. The old neighbourhood holds her just as it did before she went away. She knows the worth of these people, and her father has taught her that it is worth that counts. But I am tiring you, Mr. McLain?"

"Not at all, doctor—not at all. I find all this very interesting. If I am to be the enforced guest of these good people I am glad to know something of my entertainers. What you tell me stimulates my desire for more. Is this all the family?"

"All except Aunt Phyllis, whose cooking you will become acquainted with by degrees, and Uncle Ephraim, her husband, both of them former slaves who have never left the place, and never will, and 'little Ephraim,' your friend the barber, and his wife and children. By the way, you might have fared badly if it hadn't been for the

barber during your long sleep. He was our right hand man."

"I have been wondering how you managed with me."

"Oh, we got along, little Ephraim and I together, with the doctor and Jean thrown in for good count, though Jean was so busy with the other 'ward'—the women and children, you understand—that she couldn't do much but sit by you occasionally when the rest of us were at our meals and Ephraim was on duty somewhere else."

The young man looked up quickly.

"Did I talk much?"

"Not much. Some."

"What did I talk about?"

"Oh, nothing much that I could discover. A name now and then or a muttered sentence. It is in stories that secrets are given away in delirium, and mighty cheap stories at that, generally. Now if you had been a man in a story you would have divulged all your dark past, or else have given such a connected account of yourself in your ravings that we could have had all your adoring friends here to witness the awakening."

The patient smiled feebly. "Have you been here much of the time?"

"Yes; almost all of it. Fortunately, there isn't much sickness just now. It's between hay and grass. Pneumonia season is over and summer complaint hasn't come on. It was a convenient time for me to be away from home, and I rather took an interest in that head of yours."

"It was very good of you, certainly. I am afraid I am not worth all this trouble."

"You look as if you ought to be to somebody. In fact, when I saw you lying there by the roadside with a gash in your forehead and a broken leg, I picked you out as one that it would be worth while to put some time on. You were pretty near the better land, young

man, when we got to you. A little letting alone and you would have been there. I said to Dr. Dabney, 'Doctor, it is concussion—probably. If it is, it will be a chance. Anyway, with this leg it will be a long pull, and it will be at your house.' The old doctor looked at you as you lay there, and said solemnly, 'We'll try it, William. The world can't spare young men like this.' And the next thing, my boy, you were on a shutter and little Ephraim and another negro were carrying you across the field."

The young man gave a stifled groan, which Dr. Llewellyn interpreted to mean concern about the result.

"Of course I didn't care about your leg,—that was simple enough,—but it was the blow on your head that I was fearful about. But you are coming out all right! You are coming out all right! For which you may give thanks to Almighty God, young man, when you are able to kneel."

If he had really expected gratitude either to himself or to a higher Power he was reckoning without his host, for to his unbounded astonishment the young man turned his face to the wall with a moan that for intensity and bitterness he had never heard equalled.

"I wish to God you had let me die!"

"Oh, come!" said the doctor, soothingly. "A broken leg is not as bad as that. She'll think as much of you if you do limp a little. And I'm not going to let you limp! So there!"

But he looked a trifle anxious as he adjusted the bandage and slipped his fingers over the young man's pulse. He shook his head. It was too quick—quicker than when he had come in. Perhaps he had talked to him too long.

IV

LIFE AT THE MANSE

"JEAN!" called Dr. Llewellyn to the girl passing through the hall. "Come here! I want to ask you something."

It was the next morning after McLain's disconcerting outburst, and the doctor had stopped in on his way down to Goose Creek for the nurse. He had been sitting here for an hour or two, for reasons of his own, though little Ephraim had given an encouraging account of the night. Things moved in a leisurely way down in Tinkling Spring. An enterprising city physician would have had time while Dr. Llewellyn had been sitting here to whip out his book half a dozen times and write out as many prescriptions to be filled at the nearby drug-store in which he had stock.

The girl turned—evidently he and she were good comrades—and in a moment the white doorway framed for the sick man another life-sized portrait, this time in blue, which brought out the bloom of her cheeks as only blue does. She smiled a good-morning to both, and waited.

"Jean, how do you think Mrs. Debo is going to impress Mr. McLain?"

"As a 'cur'osity,'" declared Miss Dabney, promptly. The instant hilarity which followed showed this to be a quotation from somebody, apt and unexpected. Even Dr. Dabney, entering at this moment, smiled—though he raised a restraining hand.

"No ridicule, daughter."

"This isn't ridicule, father. It is an honour to be quoted. Indeed, Mr. McLain, she is as good as gold, and I think you will find her most interesting. Her English is a perennial joy."

She and Dr. Llewellyn went off again in a gust of laughter, and Dr. Dabney's lips twitched. So infectious was their mirth that even the man in the bed smiled without knowing at what.

Dr. Llewellyn was greatly elated over the condition in which he found his patient. Every trace of the fever —if it were fever—which had produced the singular emotional condition of the preceding day was gone. No reference was made to it, though Dr. Llewellyn purposely gave opportunity for this. Apparently McLain had forgotten all about it, for he was evidently keenly alive this morning and glad to be alive.

"What are the peculiarities of Mrs. Debo's English, if I may ask?" He divined that this was the cause of their merriment.

"Now, father, you tell. It's your turn. And then you don't like my answers."

"Well, let me see," said the minister, reflectively, entering into the spirit of her banter,—"it's originality, should you say?"

"Too weak, entirely! Next!"

"How about its fearlessness?" hazarded Dr. Llewellyn.

"Better—but hardly up to the mark. Now, I should say it's free and unlimited coinage."

Dr. Llewellyn roared.

"Go to the head, Jean! We can't improve on that."

"You really make me curious to see this lady," put in McLain. "Is her nursing of the same type as her English—original, fearless, and inventive? I don't know that I shall want to risk a leg to that combination."

"Oh, you needn't be the least afraid," encouraged Jean. "Her nursing is as conservative and old-fashioned as—Dr. Llewellyn's practice. I know all about it. She nursed me for a year once."

"A year! You?" It seemed incredible that this radiant creature, diffusing health and vigour, so to speak,

should ever have been under anybody's care for a year.

"Did you have broken bones too?"

"No. Only weak ones."

"Genevieve!"

"Well, father, you know they were. I was much more helpless than you are, Mr. McLain. I was unconscious much of the time, but they tell me that for months I could not move my body."

He looked intensely sympathetic, and involuntarily moved his head and shoulders in the joy of partial freedom.

"Yes," she went on, composedly, "you see, I was only four days old when she undertook my case. . . ." He fell back in a mock swoon. "Well, father, I only want to convince him that there is a cure even for helplessness. I told him it was only a question of being patient and waiting, but he won't believe me."

He opened his eyes then and fixed them boldly upon her.

"If this free coinage lady succeeds only half as well in my case as she has in yours I shall be more than satisfied." The admiration in his words and his eyes was so open and shameless that she beat a hasty retreat before it.

"His head is all right," Dr. Llewellyn was saying to himself; "this is just plain boy and girl 'kidding.' I wonder if he was a little off yesterday,—just for the moment. He seems perfectly normal now. Well, if there's anything wrong Mrs. Debo will discover it."

When Dr. Llewellyn had gone on his errand and Jean was busy with Mrs. Nellis's packing, Dr. Dabney told his guest the story of what Mrs. Debo had been to them in that year of Jean's helplessness. He told it with dignity and reserve, but the young man could read the pathos of it between the lines.

"I don't know what we should have done without her," the doctor concluded. "I think the Lord sent her to us, though she thinks He sent us to her, for she was greatly in need of a home at the time. She was separated

from her husband, had a little child to care for, and no means. She has been married twice. The first husband—Sandy's father—died, but she left the second one. He was a worthless fellow—this Debo. She has been knocking about from pillar to post ever since."

"And her son? Can't he support her?"

"No. Her son is a cripple—a hunchback. It is a very sad case. Sandy will never be able to do hard work and he is not fitted for anything else. He would not go to school because the boys made fun of him." His lips twitched in a half-smile. "I believe my daughter Genevieve pommelled one of her schoolfellows once for mimicking his infirmity. Came out ahead too, they tell me. The boy was bent over in a jeering caricature and she had him at a disadvantage. She never said anything to me about it nor I to her. Her Aunt Lavinia laboured with her, showing her how unladylike it was to fight, and she promised never to do it again—*unless the offence was repeated!* That was as much as she would promise. Lavinia let it go at that, I believe. She has always been discreet about not pursuing a line of argument too far with Genevieve." And he chuckled softly.

"How old is this boy?"

"I should say about twenty-one or two. He is a few years older than Genevieve. She is twenty."

The young man's mind was instantly diverted from Sandy. He had thought her older than that, perhaps because of her mature self-possession. When Dr. Dabney was gone he fell to imagining the details of that conflict so lightly sketched in, smiling to think of her as an avenger. It would seem that the boy hardly needed a pommelling after the sheet lightning of her wrath had been turned upon him.

As busy as Jean was with speeding the parting guests she yet found time to usher Mrs. Debo and the doctor into the sick room when they came, for she was full of mischievous curiosity to witness the meeting.

McLain, raising his eyes to the doorway which he had come to think of as a picture frame, saw following her a phenomenally tall, angular woman of middle age, who advanced with the softened tread of a grenadier. He would have retreated before it if he could. This was as unprepossessing a ministering angel as ever rustled a wing.

She was clothed in brown checked gingham with a long clean apron of light percale. Mrs. Debo kept the Sabbath holy by putting on a white one. There was about her as she stood there none of the soft curves of womanhood,—it seemed impossible that there could ever have been,—she had rather the form of a man; and her tanned, weather-beaten skin, her large mouth with its habit of compression, and her scanty hair drawn back from her face and done up apparently with the aid of a monkey wrench, gave colour to the idea that this was a man masquerading in female attire. Upon Mrs. Debo's head had fallen the frosts of many cold and bitter nights, but its original covering had been of that nondescript hue known as "sandy," which does not lend itself readily to this softening of time. To McLain, regarding her from the helplessness of a plaster cast and the prospect of an enforced companionship, she was appalling.

But when she took his hand in her strong, capable one and her grim mouth relaxed in a smile he felt intuitively that here was one upon whom he could depend,—an impression he never found it necessary to revise.

"I ain't a city nurse, Mr. McLain," she was telling him somewhat superfluously, "but it won't be any indetiment to your case to trust it to me. I've took care of broken legs before this, as Dr. Llewellyn can tell you. Of course they wan't as important ones as yourn, but I reckon the feet was hitched on about the same way. Jean, straighten that there counterpane. It bumbles."

The girl obeyed, raising impassive eyes to McLain's, which she knew would be ready for her. His were as expressionless, but still there was established between them the free-masonry of humour.

Mrs. Debo was ready to inspect the injured member.

"Jean, where is yo' little baby pillow?"

"Upstairs in the garret."

"Get it."

When the girl returned, bearing in her hands an infant's pillow marked "BABY," Mrs. Debo was in possession of all the facts in the case and was making her prognostications. She had put the physician through a rapid fire of questions that convinced McLain of her ability.

"Well, I declare!" she said, holding up to view the tiny pillow, and looking at it affectionately. "Don't it look natural! Jean, I can jes' see yo' curly head now on this pillow! And yo' little ear—for all the world like a crumpled rose leaf!" Then, turning to the patient, "I riz that girl, Mr. McLain—up to a yearlin'."

"So I've heard. Good job! I'm expecting you to do as well by me."

"Well—I taken her in time. I don't know about you. Some chickens is spoilt in the hatchin'. . . . Now I'll stuff this right under yo' ankle. It's soft-like and——"

"Oh, don't!" he said. With the thought of the curly head and the rose leaf ear in his mind it seemed profanation.

"Of course I will! There never was a Dabney pillow —big or little—that wasn't at the service of an achin' bone. Ain't that so, Jean?"

"I guess I'll let him have it."

"Of course you will! There! don't that feel better? We all have to be babies some time and a good many of us git to our second helplessness right soon."

Later in the day she said to him, the feeling strong within her that he felt a distrust of a country nurse:

"Now, Mr. McLain, don't you feel afraid to trust me because I ain't got on a uniform. I reckon brown gingham is as good as blue when it comes right down to it, and I kin do everything for you that a nurse in good and reg'lar standin' could do exceptin' one thing. That's the readin'. Ef you was sicker I'd feel shorer of suitin' you. It's a great help to a nurse sometimes to have a patient out of his head. As it is, you'll soon have to be entertained, and I ain't much on the entertain. Dr. Llewellyn says you mustn't use yo' eyes till yo' head is well, and I reckon the readin' will have to be turnt over to Jean. I'm powerful sorry but I don't see no other chanst."

In his joy at this necessity McLain hardly heard her apologies.

"I kin stumble through a chapter of the Bible (unless it's the begats or about them old Hit-tights and Jab-a-sights, and them I skip—right or wrong. Yes, sir, I do! —church member as I am. I don't see no good tryin' to find out *who* fit that long ago, nor *how* they fit, nor *what* they fit about.) . . . No, as I say, 'most anything else I kin stumble through, but I don't know that it would be edificacious to a soft-spoken man like you to hear me. You see," she explained, regretfully, "I have to spell out so many of the words that it kinder breaks the monotony. And that ain't pleasant. I reckon Jean's the best chanst."

McLain signified that the proposed arrangement would be entirely satisfactory to him if it was to Miss Dabney.

"Oh, she'll do it. Jean's a mighty self-sacrificing girl; and there ain't anything too hard for her to do for me. I'll help her about gittin' them people off ef you don't need me right now."

"What is that?" asked McLain the next morning, looking up from the breakfast she had brought him. The house seemed preternaturally still after the exodus of the noisy Gilmores. Mrs. Debo was bringing the

lilacs back from the hall into the freshly aired room. "It sounds like somebody singing."

"I reckon yo' hearing wasn't hurt by that lick on yo' head. That's what it is. Jean Dabney singin'."

"Why, she has a voice like a bird!"

"And yo' jedgment don't seem to be knocked out either. For that's what she has. She opens her mouth and music bubbles out the same way it does with a wren. I've always said if there was anything could take a body out of theyselves and up to the gates of glory quicker than Jean Dabney's singin' I didn't know what it was unless it was her father's prayers. Ever hear the old gentleman pray?"

"No."

"Well, when you do you'll see that he is on mighty good terms with God, and ef there's anything you want you will soon feel like the rest of us—that he's the man to ask fur it." She listened a moment at the door. "He's readin' now. He'll pray in a minute."

"What are they singing and praying for?"

"Family prayers," she said with an air of superiority which one might assume toward the heathen.

"But I haven't heard any singing before."

"No. You couldn't expect Jean to let out that voice of hern with all these sick folks in the house and you liable to be waked up any time out of yo' head. But I lay they've been havin' prayers over you ef they ain't been singin'!" She lifted one finger to enjoin silence. "Still readin'. Must be a long chapter."

"Would you like to go down?" asked McLain, with the instinctive consideration that was a part of the man.

"Well, I would—really, if you can spare me. I don't often git a chanst to hear the Gospel dispensed with at church, bein' a nurse, and I do like to meet up with family prayers occasionally—which I must say that I don't often do it, for they are just about as scarce as hens' teeth these days."

"Go on, then. Leave the door open, please."

He listened when she was gone for the girl's voice, but it was not heard again. The hymn she had sung was an old-fashioned one,—a favourite of his mother's, he remembered with a dull aching of his heart.

He found himself listening for the voice night and morning after this. Mrs. Debo always left the door open when she went down. They were old familiar hymns which fell on his ear like the echo of something he had heard long ago but had almost forgotten in the stress of passing years.

They took him back to the time when he used to walk to church beside a black-robed figure, clinging to her hand and sitting beside her in the dim, shadowy recesses, looking into her face sometimes and wondering what made her cry; sometimes putting up his lips to be kissed under the black veil with the desire to comfort her; whispering to her softly while the preacher talked, "I want to come c'ose to you!" (she told him afterwards of this); and often in the dimness and quiet of it all drowsing against her shoulder or yielding to the soft guidance of her hand that drew him down where with his curly head on the friendly pillow of her muff he went off blissfully to slumberland, there to lie until another hymn such as came to him now from below stairs roused him and he walked beside her again,—this time home.

It had been a long, long time since it had all come to him with such distinctness, and eagerly as he listened for the voice it was almost as much of a pain as a pleasure when it came, with all the memories it brought.

Possibly Mrs. Debo told somebody about his wishing to have the door left open, for one day when the doctor had pronounced him on the highroad to recovery—needing only time, but considerable of that—Dr. Dabney went up to his room, and after chatting a few minutes said:

"Mr. McLain, it is our custom to have family worship night and morning, as you may have observed from the

singing, and to me 'family' includes always the stranger that is within the gates. Would it be distasteful to you if we should come to your room for this during your convalescence, since you cannot come to us?"

"Not at all, doctor," the young man answered, heartily, his eyes resting at that moment on Jean's rosy face half buried in a mass of lilacs she was bringing in. "On the contrary, I should esteem it a privilege to be admitted thus to your family circle."

He spoke so cordially as to leave no doubt of his sincerity, though when the good doctor was gone he looked at Jean with an ingenuous smile that made her bury her hot cheeks in the lilacs again.

When the result of this overture was reported later to Miss Lavinia, she said impressively and with some emotion, "Brother, we may be very sure of one thing—that young man is not far from the Kingdom! I was reading to him from the Bible yesterday while Mrs. Debo was taking a little rest and when I was called away—I put a photograph of Jean's in to mark the place—he asked me to hand him the Bible and he would finish it himself. Think of that! A young man calling for the Holy Scriptures in these days!"

It was in this way that Mr. Archer McLain's sick room became the centre of the family devotional life of the Dabneys, somewhat to his amusement and very much to his gratification. After the first surprise of it all, McLain found himself taking a distinct pleasure in this archaic service. His father, whom he scarcely remembered, except as recollection had been reinforced by tradition, had been a godly man of the old school, like Dr. Dabney, and a minister; and though McLain had got far enough away from such things since, he could dimly recall this very custom in his own home. Its revival now in this singular way after the lapse of years seemed to bring his innocent childhood close to him. It touched him that they should wish to include him in

what he distinctly perceived was for them the vital part of life. He could not question the genuineness of the faith with which they listened to the reading of the Scriptures, which was to them the ultimate authority on all the questions that life asks. While he might not be able to embrace it, such a faith, held so unostentatiously, was to the man cast into its midst one that at least compelled respect.

But it must be admitted that while McLain had in time all these feelings in regard to the devotional opportunities brought thus to his very feet, his first cordial acquiescence in the plan came from altogether another motive, as has been hinted. With Mrs. Debo's installation as nurse he had seen less and less of Jean Dabney, and this opportunity to be near her night and morning, to watch her with half-shut eyes from his reclining chair, to listen to her flute-like voice so close to him that he could see the pulsing of her white throat, was enough to stir the devotional spirit of most young men of twenty-five. He came to look forward to it hungrily.

They always sang; Jean leading in a clear soprano, Miss Lavinia adding a quavering alto, and Dr. Dabney a fair bass. One morning McLain found himself softly humming a tenor, hearing which Jean without a break in the music drew her little rocker to the side of his invalid's chair, and sharing her hymn book with him, gave an invitation by means of uplifted brows. He accepted as silently, and the two voices rose and blended in a rapturous harmony of sound that somehow left them not the same to one another they had been. After that she always sat beside him and when she knelt was so close to him that he wanted sometimes to put out his hand upon the bowed head with its masses of red-brown hair.

It must be acknowledged that he thought more about the head than the prayer.

V

THE MONEY GOD

IF quick-knitting bone and rapidly healing flesh were the test of pure blood, as Dr. Llewellyn had intimated, McLain's was certainly proving up to the mark. Nothing could be more satisfactory than his swift and steady progress. Mrs. Debo's prophecy that she would have him ready for an invalid's chair before the chair could be brought from St. Louis was literally verified.

It came at last, however, and, clean-shaven and clothed in a dressing gown startlingly luxurious for Tinkling Spring, which was more accustomed to take its ease in a well-settled coat, *or without it,* than in a dressing gown; with the disfiguring bandage cast aside and an afghan thrown over his plaster leg, Mr. Archer McLain as he lay back in the aforesaid chair might really be said to adorn it. He was a most interesting looking invalid, and it is not surprising that Genevieve Dabney should have been moved to take up without much urging the self-denying rôle assigned her of First Reader.

She was, indeed, aside from her capacity for self-sacrifice upon which Mrs. Debo had laid some stress, well fitted for the task—nature having endowed her with a flexible and sympathetic voice, to which her father had added a cultivated taste. Her power of entering into an author's meaning and conveying it in all that was in the lines and between the lines was the gift of the gods.

Mrs. Debo soon discovered that her office of nurse, beyond the morning and evening hours, was a sinecure,

and Archer McLain found himself looking forward eagerly to the time for the day's reading to begin. It was such fun to watch the play of emotion on the girl's face. She entered so intensely into what she read. In the days when they were groping for each other's tastes they contented themselves with the magazines, and while not much given to stories himself his tastes in that direction seemed suddenly to have taken a new impetus; for stories afforded so much more opportunity for the revealing of herself to him than did the muckraking articles and tariff diatribes and kindred weighty subjects with which she tried at first to appeal to his masculine likings.

It seemed suddenly to have become more important to know what she thought of a thing than what the writer thought; her attitude toward life and its actors, their successes and failures, their follies and foibles, their shortcomings and overcomings was now of supreme moment to him. Her views were not difficult to obtain, for Dr. Dabney had trained his daughter to discuss with him everything she read. As a consequence she had a quick grasp of a subject and a mature way of looking at things that both surprised and interested him.

On the other hand, a masculine point of view which was neither elderly nor ministerial had its own novel attraction for her.

The reading of an article on the Passion Play accidentally brought his world into range.

"That writer is unjust," he said when she had finished. "What he says may be true, but how can you prevent a spirit of commercialism from getting abroad among a simple, primitive people away up in the Bavarian Alps when a crowd of sixteen thousand descends each week upon a community of sixteen hundred? Those visitors must be taken care of by somebody; and will you tell me how you can house and feed such multitudes without entering into commercial operations to do it? I don't

believe at all that it has degenerated into a money-making concern. I think those peasants are sincere and earnest. It seemed so to me when I was there."

She laid down her book with kindling eyes.

"Have you ever been to the Passion Play?"

"Yes."

"Oh, tell me about it! I have always wanted to hear that at first hand."

To the country girl who had read much and travelled little the Old World, with its treasures of history and art and song, was the Promised Land. She had never hoped to do more than stand on some Nebo's height and view it from afar; but here was one who could bring it to her and lay it at her feet. And he did. When that recital was finished Mrs. Debo even, who had not spoken a word, heaved a deep sigh and took up her neglected knitting.

"It's like readin' from a picture book without havin' to spell out ary a word!" she said. "I'll go down and get you a good lunch for that."

McLain laughed and waved her his thanks as she went out.

"I have always been so wild to go abroad," said Jean. "Tom—that's Tom Alexander, my cousin, who lives in St. Louis, is in Paris now. He writes me a little about the places he visits, but his letters are usually taken up with other things. He says the post-cards must tell me about the things he sees. Don't you hate post-cards? They never mean anything to you unless you've seen the places yourself, and of course I never have, not having travelled. I would just as soon look at the pictures in a geography and read from a copy-book. It is fully as satisfying. The truth is"—she went on after a pause, during which McLain lay idly watching the colour come and go in her cheeks and wondering about Tom—"I don't believe Tom is getting out of this trip what he ought to get. I think he is a

good deal bored with it all—except Paris. I am sure I should see more than he does, for I should be so intensely interested."

"And isn't he?"

"Oh, no! Tom isn't intensely interested in anything in the world. He is not built on the intense plan. He is too easy-going. But he is good. Dear old Tom!"

McLain suddenly felt himself to be built on the intense plan if Tom was not. He had a most unreasonable and fervid desire to punch the head of any cousin, near or remote, who could bring such a sweetly reminiscent smile to the lips of *his* reader.

"How long does Mr. Alexander remain abroad?"

"He went to spend a year." (That was good at any rate.) "But I don't believe he will stay out the time. He says he can't stand it—being away from his mother, I suppose he means. He has been gone about three months."

"Is he studying?"

"Tom?" She looked amused. "No, he is not studying. Tom never studied in his life. He is just there for a good time (which he doesn't seem to be having) and because Aunt Josephine thinks a year of travel imparts polish to a young man. Aunt Josephine is great on polish."

"You are fond of your aunt, I see."

"Oh, very! You are a discerning young man, Mr. McLain. The truth is I am not so fond of my Aunt Josephine as of my Aunt Lavinia; perhaps because the former loves little and exacts much, while the latter is content to love much and exact nothing at all. Then Aunt Josephine nags father, and I can't stand that. I resent it. What right has she to come up here and nag my father in his own house?"

"I'm afraid I have unwittingly stepped into a hornets' nest. I apologize to the hornets and retire from the field."

"You needn't. The hornets are so used to a stirring up that they do nothing but buzz now. But some of these days they'll sting!"

He laughed. "That sounds deeply, darkly mysterious."

"There is no mystery about it. It only means that some day I shall defy my Aunt Josephine, and then——"

"And then——?"

"And then I will make her understand that my life is my own to do with as I please. She hasn't learned that yet. She thinks because I am a Charlton and she is a Charlton she can map out my life to suit herself; and I feel that though mere Dabneys, father and I are quite equal to taking care of it ourselves."

"And so you are issuing a declaration of independence?"

"I am going to! And it will be followed by war! It is no good being a Charlton unless I can live up to the fighting blood!"

She looked so pretty with her flashing eyes and her flushed cheeks that he was tempted to prolong the occasion.

"Am I to understand that the battle is on now?"

She shook her head. "No, it can't begin until August."

"Why August?"

"Well—this is to be a hand-to-hand conflict and Aunt Josephine isn't due until August."

"I see. Since you have introduced the subject would you mind telling me what this irrepressible conflict is about? The beginning sounds interesting. I suspect a romance. The blushing lady of the tale I behold; the hero——"

"The 'hero'!" she interrupted, scornfully. "I wonder why it is that when anything bordering upon a romance is mentioned the man immediately becomes a 'hero'? In actual fact, this man is about as heroic as

a little tin god. You may call him the man in the case, if you like, but not the hero!"

He was emboldened by her tone of antagonism to proceed.

"And you wouldn't mind telling me? I should like your confidence immensely."

"No. I don't think I mind. I really am troubled about this thing and I have nobody to go to. Father is too good and Aunt Lavinia too soft-hearted."

"And you come to me because I look hard-hearted and not very good? Is that it?"

"Oh, *hush!* I come to you because you are near enough my own age to understand—just as Tom would if he were here. I wish he were, this minute."

"Go on," he said, settling himself into a listening posture. "I'll do my best to take Tom's place—temporarily. It couldn't be more than temporarily, could it?"

"No, indeed. Nobody could ever take Tom's place to me—permanently."

"That's one point settled. Now——"

"You see," she began, knitting her brows in a look of real perplexity that appealed to him in spite of his light words, "Aunt Josephine wishes to form for me what she calls an 'alliance.'"

"Matrimonial, of course?"

"Of course. With a man twice my age—a bachelor —who has no end of money."

His eyes contracted. That, with a scheming aunt thrown in, was a dangerous combination.

"He is a man of character?"

"He is a man of fine family. That counts for a good deal with Aunt Josephine, as indeed it would with me. He is educated and travelled, has irreproachable manners,—but I don't know anything about the other. Aunt Josephine says when I ask her about his character that of course he is a man of the world—whatever that is.

I suppose she means that he has been around a good deal. You see, he has never done much but have a good time, and everybody always laughs and says he certainly has done that. No, I don't really know anything against him except that Tom says——"

"What does Tom say?"

"That he would rather see me dead than married to him. He wouldn't tell me why."

McLain found himself instantly aligned with Tom. A feeling of revolt against Aunt Josephine and this worldly marriage she was urging upon the girl—this pure-souled, innocent girl—rose within him. He knew the type, as did Tom.

"And you are trying to make up your mind?"

Her white teeth gleamed.

"No, indeed! As old Uncle Snake-bit Bob used to say in 'Diddie, Dumps, and Tot,' that classic of my childhood, 'My min', hit's made up.' I am trying to make up Aunt Josephine's mind."

"Oh!"

"You see, Mr. McLain, she has set her heart on my marrying this man—for his money. It seems a harsh thing to say, but it is the naked truth that Aunt Josephine loves money better than she loves anything else in this world. She is not aware of it, but she does. She talks money. She thinks money. She has no means of weighing people except with gold—no way of estimating them except in dollars and cents. You've seen that kind of people, haven't you?"

He nodded.

"Well, I never had until I spent my first winter with Aunt Josephine. I suppose I had always unconsciously used father's standards. I used to sit and listen to the talk between her and her friends. It was all about rich people. It seemed that nobody else counted, no matter what they were or what they had done. It was not as if such persons were disliked. They were simply

ignored. For Aunt Josephine—and her kind—people of the middle class do not exist. The wealthy they adore; the indigent they patronize and assist; but the self-respecting, cultivated man of small income is for them as if he had not been born. And the amazing part of it all to me was that the innate vulgarity of all this never seemed to have occurred to them. It was positively funny! Well, this is my Aunt Josephine, and she has set her heart on my marrying money and becoming one of this inner circle! . . . No, of course it is none of her affair, but she likes to manage people, and she will die hard. She worries my life out of me about this man."

"Where did you meet him?"

"In St. Louis, last winter. It is all Aunt Josephine's doings. She threw us together constantly. The thing was made up between them, in cold blood. She as much as told me so afterwards. That's one thing I hate about it. I don't think these things can be managed by outsiders, do you?"

"I have never had much experience with 'these things,'" he said, seriously, "but I should say not—in this country."

"Why, of course they can't! And then he is so old! Would you want to marry a man twice your age?"

"Most decidedly not. I shouldn't want to marry a man of any age."

She made a grimace.

"Oh, you are such a kid! There is no danger of your ever being too old to marry anybody! I doubt if you ever grow up. Now, I want you to be serious and help me out. This man is coming up here if I don't head him off. Again! after all that has passed. Aunt Josephine writes me he is, and so does he."

"You correspond with him, do you?"

"Why, no! of course I don't. Would I correspond with a man I had refused to marry?"

"You didn't tell me that."

"You could have guessed it if you had had any penetration. That's what a girl almost always does when she doesn't accept. I'll tell you that much for your future guidance."

"No. Sometimes she tells him gently that she will be a sister to him—or a friend. Didn't you do that?"

"No, I didn't. I don't want to be anything to him."

"There was where you made your mistake. If you had done that he would have been so angry that the probabilities are he would have gone away and stayed away. See?" A moment later he said seriously, "If you really want to be rid of this man why don't you dismiss him peremptorily?"

"You certainly are a helpful counsellor!" she said with derision. "That *would* be a good thing, wouldn't it? But you see the peculiarity of this particular man is that he won't stay dismissed. He doesn't seem to understand the English language—not the smallest word of it. After each refusal he bobs up serenely with a floral offering in his hand and goes at it again. It is the truth! The first thing he did after he went away from here the last time—when I thought it was settled for good and ever—was to send me a box of American Beauties! I took them out in the backyard and stamped on them. Aunt Phyllis thought I was having a fit and threw cold water in my face."

She stopped to laugh hysterically over this and then went on:

"He will persist in sending me things, even when I beg him not to do it. Father won't let me send them back to him, for he never sends anything but flowers and books and such things. But I can't bear it! It always seems to me that with every fresh consignment he is saying, 'My dear girl, you don't understand. Money can buy anything—even you—if only the payments are kept up!' Now would you like that?"

He shook his head.

"You asked about my writing to him. In common decency I have to acknowledge these things, which I do in the briefest of notes, and that brings a letter from him—but I never answer until there comes another relay. He has sent me boxes and boxes of chocolates. He has an idea that all girls like them—and I hate chocolates so that I don't like anybody that likes them! I give them all to little Ephraim's children. Then when I told him I didn't like candy he took to sending me books. . . . Yes, that's where all these novels come from. You might know father didn't buy them."

"Now, don't give them to little Ephraim's children," he pleaded. "I am expecting a feast when I get down on the porch."

She gave a delighted girlish giggle.

"No, I'm saving them to start a neighbourhood library. I wrote to him that I could accept them on those terms only. You see, a public library is rather an impersonal thing and I thought he might as well spend his money that way as any other. That lessened the supply a little, but he still sends twice as many as I can read. His latest trick is to send some theological books to father that he has been wanting some time. *Books on theology,* now, if you please! With them came a note saying that he hoped to hear father's opinion of them some time—perhaps he might be able to run up a few days this summer! Wasn't that cool? Of course father wrote to him, thanking him for the books and giving him a cordial invitation to come—in the innocence of his dear old heart. So Mr. Morris Maltby now has his invitation from headquarters. And there you are!"

"The man is foxy."

"He is 'Foxy Grandpa'!" she said, maliciously. And they laughed with the scorn of the twenties for the remote forties.

"How did he know your father's tastes?"

"He was up here a short time ago, as I told you, and father was talking with him about these books. Father thinks *every*body is interested in theology! And I must say that Mr. Maltby entered into it and really seemed to be."

"Did your father like him?"

"Yes—unfortunately—very much. That makes it so much harder. He *is* attractive. I liked him myself at first—until—until—oh, well, you know how that always spoils everything with a girl."

"I didn't suppose it did."

"It does, I can tell you!—when the 'reciprocity is all on one side,' as Dr. Llewellyn says."

When they were through laughing over this he said seriously:

"Do you really, truly want to get rid of this man?"

"I certainly do. There is something about him from which I recoil. I can't tell you what it is. I sometimes ask myself the question and never answer it satisfactorily. It is something instinctive. Don't you believe we can trust our instincts?"

"Sometimes. Not always."

"I can."

"Perhaps—in this case. Now I will tell you what to do."

He spoke so quietly and yet with such certainty that she found herself resting upon his judgment in advance.

"You go to your father and tell him this whole story just as you have told it to me—of the man's importunity, your aunt's insistence, and your feeling of repugnance. Then ask him to recall this invitation."

"He wouldn't do it," she said, disappointed. "Why, to father an invitation is like a law of the Medes and Persians. It altereth not! The canons of hospitality are as inviolable to him as the Moral Law. He wouldn't recall it if the man were proved a—criminal."

The lines of his mouth hardened.

"Then tell him what Tom said to you and ask him to write to Tom and find out what he meant."

"Tom wouldn't tell him. He wouldn't even tell me."

"He might tell your father even if he didn't tell you; and if he is the man I take him for—from that remark—I believe he would do it."

"I don't think it," she said, "I don't believe Tom will tell, even if he knows anything, and if he does father would be sure to think it was because—well, you see, Tom thinks a good deal of me himself. That's one reason he wouldn't do it."

McLain looked at her, half smiling and wagging his head from side to side.

"You'll give in! All they will have to do is to keep it up. You'll look at him differently after a while."

"I will not!" she cried, indignantly. "Why, the man is *weak,* with all his persistency. Do you suppose I would ever marry anybody but a strong man?"

"Say! you'd better marry a woman. All men are weak—more or less—didn't you know that?"

"No, they are not, either. Father isn't weak. Dr. Llewellyn isn't weak. Do you know," she said with a burst of enthusiasm, "I think a strong man is the most glorious thing in the world—because of his opportunities—and because he has temptations and resists them."

"Oh, he does!" There was a mocking light in his eyes. "You know men right down to the ground, don't you!"

"I know father," she insisted.

"Your father is a king of his kind. I'll admit that."

"And Dr. Llewellyn?"

"Another scion of royalty. I'll never go back on my doctor."

"And Tom?"

"Now I decline to accept your unsupported statement that Tom too is a king. I suspect that on this side of

the Atlantic he would be just an ordinary individual like the rest of us."

Then as he lay back in his chair looking at her sweet, pure face the smile slowly faded from his lips and the mocking tone died out of his voice. "You are a fortunate girl," he said with great gentleness, "to have lived your life among good men. May you never be thrown, closely, with any other kind. And now—since they are entirely impersonal—may I see your foreign post-cards?"

"I'll hunt them up when I come back. I'm going away this afternoon."

"Going away!" he echoed, blankly. "Where? For how long?"

"Only to Putney. And I shan't be gone long—not more than a week or two."

"A week or two! One could die of loneliness in a week," he grumbled. "And in two——"

"Not with Mrs. Debo around! But I will come back just as soon as I can. You see, I *have* to go at this time. Bess Claiborne is to be married, and she was my chum at Monticello. I can't put it off."

There was a suggestion of disinclination which consoled him.

"And what am I going to do for reading?"

"I'll leave you some of Mr. Maltby's books," she said, cheerfully. "Maybe he will send some American Beauties while I am gone. If he does, you may have them."

"You say that because you know I am in no condition to get up and stamp on them."

He did not let her perceive how dismayed he was at the prospect of spending a whole week—perhaps two—without her. But when he heard the carriage wheels on the drive two hours later and knew she was gone, he felt bereft.

VI

MRS. DEBO DISCOURSES ON MEN

THE weeks of Jean's absence seemed to the invalid never-ending. Despite Mrs. Debo's gift of conversation, Dr. Dabney's daily visits, and Miss Lavinia's morning chapter in the Bible (chosen with reference to McLain's supposed spiritual state), time was heavy on his hands. Dr. Llewellyn had interdicted reading for the present on account of his head, and he must needs fall back upon thought; and thought, for some unexplainable reason, was not agreeable to him just now. Depression fell on him like a pall.

"I don't know what to make of him," Mrs. Debo confided to Dr. Llewellyn. "He ain't doin' near so well as he was last week. Why, he was as gaily as a young filly then. And he is now sometimes when he rouses up. But he is fitty! and he ain't the kind of man that was born fitty. I can't get at it yet, what's the matter with him."

"Don't let him brood. Talk to him—about anything—it doesn't matter much what, so long as it takes him out of himself. I don't like the turn things have taken—though perhaps it won't last. I guess it is only that he misses Jean. Does he seem anxious to get away?"

"No. Anyway, he don't say anything about it. But he don't seem to take any interest. I tried to talk to him yesterday about Sandy. It 'peared to me that anybody in his right senses would take an interest in Sandy—but he didn't seem to."

"How is Sandy?" The doctor was ready to attest his own sanity.

"He's well—but I'm mightily troubled about him. Sandy ought to be doin' something, doctor. He gets to broodin', and then he gets hard to live with. I've been thinkin' of puttin' him with Zeb Horn to learn the shoemaker's trade."

"Good idea! It will do them both good."

"You think it wouldn't do any harm to Sandy? There's them that says it would."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the doctor. "'There's them' that will say anything. Zeb Horn wouldn't harm a fly."

"It's more'n a question of flies. I know he's kind to animals. Everybody says that. But I don't want Sandy's moralities put out o' j'int even ef his back is."

"Zeb Horn won't hurt Sandy's 'moralities.' You send him over there. It will be good for them both."

"Well—I'll see. Marthy Freno she always says Zeb Horn is a good man."

"She ought to know. He lived there, didn't he?"

"Yes. But they turnt him off, jes' like the rest. I dunno."

She had followed the doctor to the door for this conversation, and when she returned to the sick room she sat silent some time, pondering the complex subject of Sandy's future while her darning needle went in and out.

"Mrs. Debo," said McLain, abruptly, "do you know Miss Dabney's cousin, Mr. Alexander?"

"Tom Alexander? Well, I reckon I do! I've known him since he was in short pants."

"What sort of a man is he?" He had determined now to get it from somebody if he could.

"Nice fellow. Nobody has more friends in this neighbourhood than Tom Alick. Pleasant and good-natured, with a kind word for everybody. That's Tom."

"Is he what you would call a strong man?"

"In his health?"

"No, in his character." He asked her because he

perceived that, unlettered as she was, she was a reader of character.

"Well now, you've asked me the one question I'd rather not answer. And yet I don't know why. I don't know anything against Tom Alexander. I never heard of his havin' any bad habits,—and still—I would say that kind-hearted as he is, there was a weak streak in him that would come out some time and somehow. No . . . I wouldn't say he was one of your real strong men. I don't know what Jean could make of him."

"Is there anything between them?"

He felt like a cad for asking her, but he had to know.

"Well—he's been in love with her since they was children. Everybody knows that. Sometimes puppy love lasts and sometimes it don't."

There was nothing more said, and Mrs. Debo's thoughts quickly reverted to the subject of Sandy and his connection with Zeb Horn. McLain on his part was equally preoccupied. When at last the nurse spoke, her words framed a question that was the natural outgrowth of her perplexity, but it was one that broke upon her patient's train of thought with strange and sinister pertinence.

"Mr. McLain, when a man's done something he can't get away from, like murder or stealin', do you suppose he can ever be trusted?"

"What?"

He turned upon her sharply, but she was intent upon her needle and her thoughts and did not see his face.

"I was thinkin' about Zeb Horn, and whether I would darst to put my Sandy with him, to learn a trade, you know."

"Who is Zeb Horn?"

It came to him all at once that he had heard this name before and had asked this same question then. Was it one of those uncanny flashes of memory that come to us sometimes in which everything is so startlingly familiar

that though we know we have never been surrounded by these circumstances before, we are made instantly aware of all that has been said and will be said?

In a moment more he had placed it. He had heard Jean call this name once in talking to her father in his presence. He had asked curiously at the time, "Who is Zeb Horn? His very name sounds interesting." "One of father's protégés," Jean had said, and he had turned to the minister expecting a story, for Dr. Dabney was as full of stories as of Bible texts. To his surprise and somewhat to his discomfiture the minister had answered with unwonted gravity, "A maimed soul, Mr. McLain." Naturally the subject was dropped, but he had determined to ask Jean some time what her father meant, for there was that in the doctor's manner which stimulated curiosity. It had been forgotten, however, until now the name had come strangely to him again.

"Who is Zeb Horn?" he repeated.

"He's a man in this neighbourhood. I don't know much about him, but"—she spoke hesitatingly—"he done something onct—nobody knows what—and he can't get away from it. People don't have much to do with Zeb Horn around here, but Marthy Freno, she always says he's a good man."

"Where does he live?"

"Down the road a piece—a right smart piece, when it comes to that."

"What does he do?"

"He's a shoemaker. That's why I'm thinkin' of lettin' Sandy go over thar—to learn his trade. It's a good settin'-down trade, and Sandy can't never do anything at hard work. Sandy's a hunchback, Mr. McLain, and a dwarft."

He felt a throb of pity at the patient hopelessness of her tone that took him out of himself and his own troubles.

"Yes. The doctor told me. It is very sad."

"It's worse'n sad!" she said, sharply. "Sandy was as straight as any child onct. Did the doctor tell you that?"

"No; it was Dr. Dabney that spoke to me about it."

"Oh! Dr. Dabney! Well,—he wouldn't tell about that! Dr. Dabney is hard on sin, but he's powerful easy on the sinner. Now, I ain't! I say when a man's done anything it ought to be helt ag'in him! 'The truth's the light, and let her shine!' I've been blamed for tellin' the truth about marryin'. But I don't believe in crackin' up the married state for what it ain't. And it ain't no soft snap, lemme tell you, not for a woman that marries a widower lookin' for a housekeeper he don't have to pay wages to! That's Martin Debo! . . . Yes, sir, Martin was his first name and ef his last had a-been Satan there wouldn't a-been anybody that would a-disputed his lawful right to it. Anyway, his family wouldn't. But I didn't know that when I married him. And that's what I say. You can't tell. Why, Mr. McLain, I was a widow woman onct, and Sandy's back was as straight as anybody's—but then seems like a woman never does know when she's well off!"

"Was he unkind to you?"

She shook her head from side to side, but not in denial, and closed her eyes. "Ah-h, *Lord!*"

"I can stand a good deal for myself," she went on, "and did, but when Debo hit Sandy one day and—hurt him—so his little back growed crooked," her homely, ill-favoured face twitched painfully, "then I quit. . . . No, I ain't never got a divorce. A divorce ain't nothin' but a chance to marry again—and I didn't want that. The Lord knows I'd had my gorge o' marryin'! . . . You can't blame me, Mr. McLain."

"No, indeed!"

"I knew you'd say that. Your head ain't cracked—not clear through, anyway! Now there's some folks down on Goose Creek says I oughtn't to a-give it up

so soon; that marryin' is a kinder chance game and ef I'd a-kep' at it I'd a-drawed something after a while. But I says, 'No, sir!'"—She lifted the outspread palm of renunciation.—"'Not for me! Not for Drusilla! It's a chance game all right,' I says, 'but the prizes is too skeerce!'

"The trouble is, Mr. McLain," she continued in the impartial manner of one who has thought so much about a vital subject that it has become impersonal, "the trouble is that there's so many kinds of meanness in men that ef, by the mercy of the Lord, you miss one you are pretty sure to hit another,—and then, whichever you have to live with, you think that's the worst they is! Ain't that so?"

"We're a pretty bad lot," he agreed.

"You air that—takin' you by and large! Of course I don't mean you and sech as you—you know that well enough. I expect you're jest as clean and straight a young fellow as my Sandy—and there ain't nothin' crooked about Sandy but his back, ef I do say it as shouldn't! . . . Yes, sir, there's a many kind of meannesses a woman is liable to meet up with in the man she marries that she didn't suspicion was there tell she finds it settin' right opposite to her."

"I suppose a man is hardly liable to 'meet up' with any kind of meanness sitting right opposite to him when he marries, is he?"

"Yes, he is too! Don't you go to countin' on that! I reckon we're all made out o' the same batch o' dough."

McLain laughed, remembering Mrs. Poyser and her immortal epigram, "I'm not sayin' women ain't fools. God A'mighty made 'em to match the men."

But Mrs. Debo's strictures upon humanity were personal observations and by no means at second hand.

"*Yes,* sir, women has meannesses, jes' the same as men, only it does seem like they ain't quite so he-nious-like and variegated."

McLain laughed. "You are fond of moralizing, Mrs. Debo."

"Moralizin'? Is that what you call it? I'm always sort of 'fraid when I git to talkin' about men that I'm *im*-moralizin'."

She went on, for she was not to be thrown off from her enumeration. "Now, as I was sayin', there's whiskey meanness (and that heads a whole percession, lemme tell you!); and there's woman meanness—talk about the wisdom of Solomon, and him goin' around askin', 'Who can find a virtuous woman?'—humph! . . . and then there's temper meanness, but I reckon there ain't no sex to that kind; and picayune meanness; and crooked meanness;—all of 'em is hard on women! And then there's jes' plain no-'count meanness, that ain't reely meanness at all at first, but amounts to it in the long run.

"That's the kind my first was—Sandy's father, you know. He warn't a bad man. He was a good man. But good for nothin' on the face of the earth! Jes' *do*less! Wouldn't put on a palin' till the hogs was in the corn, and then—well, of course! Fine lookin' man he was too—six foot tall and large accordin', and a smile that made you forget all the warnin's folks give you—till afterwards. We was walkin' along the road one day before we was married and it come over me all at onct how big and strong he was and I says: 'Sandy, you're jes' like that there oak—so sturdy like.' He looked mighty pleased, and he says (there was a wild grape-vine hangin' on to that tree)—and he says, 'Yes, I'm the oak,' he says, 'and you'll be the twiny vine, won't you, Druse?' and he give my hand a little squeeze, and my! that sounded awful pretty to me. We felt jes' like we was writin' poetry!"

She paused a moment, and McLain strangled a smile at the conceit of this raw-boned, self-sufficient sister as the vine!

"And were you?" he asked.

"Was I what?—the vine? . . . No! . . . I never found no time to twine. It kep' me busy holdin' up the oak."

McLain laughed outright. He found this woman's observations on life and its actors—those that had appeared on her small stage—vastly amusing. She possessed a keen analytic power which owed no debt to schools and schoolmasters, but was the product of that relentless pedagogue, Experience, who sometimes sharpens our wits on his grindstone and sometimes dulls them—according to the quality of the wits and the heaviness of the bearing down.

Mrs. Debo's were of a native virility that one occasionally sees springing from families of stunted, scanty intellectuality—sporadic cases, as it were, to the confounding of the believer in heredity and the physicist who asserts that a stream cannot rise higher than its source—and the sharpening of circumstances had not been lacking. She had been burden bearer for three families; for, her mother dying in her youth and leaving behind her a family of young children to a father who felt apparently that his parental responsibility to his offspring ended with their advent into this world, she had been forced early to take a woman's place in the strife. The father, soon consoled by a young widow who had a larger, softer nest than his own, flitted to it without undue delay and joyously began the rearing of another brood, leaving last year's birdlings to fend for themselves, Drusilla at their head.

She did it some way, for she was strong of frame and stout of heart, and she kept them together until the boys could stand alone and the girls went out when little more than children to take up such lives as their mother's had been. The struggle strengthened her, without doubt, but it did not tend to soften her judgments of men,—not even of Sandy Lachlan, the good-natured, blond-haired giant whom she married when she was free at last to

choose a life for herself, believing thankfully that here at last was one strong enough for her to lean upon.

Sandy was strong physically, but "sappy," as she had to admit to herself before a disappointed honeymoon was over. Undoubtedly she would have strengthened Sandy's spiritual backbone by the vigorous treatments she found time to give it, but before his case had been much more than definitely diagnosed and the necessity for treatment decided upon, he came to an untimely end from a runaway team, leaving his widow with an infant Sandy in her arms—and nothing else.

If she had been content with this experiment it would have been better for her and Sandy too, poor boy, but Drusilla, who had no fear of work when she had her two strong arms to do it with, found it was another story to keep herself afloat with one, the other being engaged in holding up a baby. So when Martin Debo offered to take her and the little Sandy to his home and care for them she yielded to the temptation and went—without much love (which might have helped her over the hard places) but rather with the hope of getting Sandy well placed. She had taken the pains to ascertain that Martin Debo would be likely to make her a living, being full of "snap," which had been poor Sandy Lachlan's greatest lack.

But as Mrs. Debo said, "there's a many kind of meannesses," and it was not long before she found that Mr. Debo was possessed of several varieties—among them a violent temper and a periodical surrender to strong drink. It is a bad combination for domestic happiness, and Mrs. Debo bore much. But one day Debo, in a drunken rage, struck the child a blow that—well, a child's back is a tender thing, and Dr. Llewellyn called the trouble that developed shortly, "curvature of the spine," saying that it might have come from any one of several causes. Mrs. Debo was not deceived. She knew what it had come from. At night when her husband came

in from his work her household gods were packed and she stood before him, white-faced and hard, telling him what the doctor had said, and adding as her final word, "I'll quit now—before there's another child in the house for you to cripple."

She had done a little of everything since, drifting finally into nursing, in which occupation her powerful frame, her good judgment, and her big heart made her valuable in a community that knew not the trained nurse. Her experience from house to house added greatly to her knowledge of human nature.

This was the story, briefly and consecutively sketched, that McLain was gathering scrap by scrap from her discursive talk.

"You've had a hard life, Mrs. Debo."

"Yes," she said, reflectively; "I reckon mine's been a little harder than some; but let me tell you this, Mr. McLain—when you get right down to it, and clost enough to see, *they are all hard!* Maybe not to-day—but yesterday—or to-morrow."

On his face there was an impenetrable look which she took for dissent.

"It don't seem so, I know, and young folks like you that has theirs all to come, never thinks it is so. I've been places where I'd say when I first got there, 'Here's one place where nothin' rubs. . . .' But you wait! Let me stay long enough, and there's the galled spot, and the harness bearin' down on it. It comes to us all—and it has a hundred different ways of comin'."

"I suspect you are right," he said, more to himself than to her.

"'Thy fate is the common fate of all.'"

"I don't remember whether it was Paul or Solomon said that," she remarked, "but it is true enough to be preached on a heap oftener than what it is. That's why

I don't put in much time studyin' over *my* hard times. There's always somebody else's to look at. When I git downhearted I jes' think of Sandy and then say to myself, '*You*—with your strong, straight back! you—a-complainin'!' . . . Well, that always fetches me up standin'! . . . But, Mr. McLain, it's harder for me to stand it for Sandy than it is for myself. Sandy ain't ever had a fair chanct. It wasn't his fault."

"Maybe it is easier for him to bear than if it had been his fault," he said, enigmatically.

She did not stop to discuss this point.

"You see,"—her homely face transfigured by the mother love shining from it—"Sandy don't have no pleasures. He can't have. I've set here and listened to you and Jean Dabney readin' together and enjoyin' it so, and it jes' made my heart ache to think that Sandy never could have even that."

"Why can't he? That is a pleasure that is open to all."

"Mr. McLain, Sandy can't read—enough to reely sense a thing. He wouldn't go to school because the children made fun of him. And now he is too old to learn."

"Nonsense! Nobody is too old that wants to learn. Send him to me for two hours every day. I'll teach him. . . . Could I? Why, of course I could. I've seen men learn to read that were older than Sandy when they began."

"You have! Where?" She did not notice, in her eagerness of acceptance, that her question was unanswered.

She was so profuse in her thanks that he said at last, "That's all right. Go on with your story. Did Debo ever marry again?"

"No! Couldn't. You see, I left it that-a-way, not gettin' a divorce." Her mouth twitched. The good luck coming to Sandy lightened her spirits. "Dr. Dab-

ney says everybody ought to do all they can for their own kind, and I didn't know anything better I could do for the female sect than to keep Debo from marryin' into it again."

He threw back his head with a laugh that it did her good to hear.

"Maybe you think I'm hard on men, Mr. McLain?"

"Not harder than we deserve, I'm afraid."

"No. I've had experience, and it's made me look at it some sharper than most, I reckon. The Bible says, 'Mark the perfect man.' Well, you don't need to mark him. He's done marked himself, the perfect man has! He won't get lost in a crowd, for there won't be but one where he's goin'! . . . No, sir! Men, take 'em by the load, and leavin' out present company, is pretty much like apples. *There's very few of 'em that ain't specked!* . . . Once in a while you'll find a golden pippin like Dr. Dabney, rounded out on all sides till you wouldn't want to change the shape—not a mite—that's mellow and juicy with kind feelin' and sound clear through. But there ain't many like that, I can tell you! Most of 'em is a little knerly!"

"Why, Mrs. Debo!" laughed her patient. "You speak in parables."

"Parables! Mr. McLain," Mrs. Debo raised a shocked face, "do you know who it was talked in parables? . . . Well, I'm mighty sinful, especially when I git to thinkin' about Debo and Sandy's back, but I hope I never will be so onChristian as to try to talk like my Saviour!"

She was so genuinely disturbed that McLain could only beg her pardon in the humblest terms.

"Please go on," he begged. "I shall feel that you haven't forgiven me unless you do."

"Well, as I was a-sayin'," she resumed, flattered at his interest, and naturally not wishing to leave a simile suspended in air, like Mohammed's coffin, "you can't

expect all apples to be big. There's scrub stock in apples —and men—same as there is in cattle. 'It ain't size that counts, son,' I says to Sandy, 'it's soundness!' And when you come to think of it, Mr. McLain, how many will you find in a load that's sound through and through?"

He shook his head and she answered her own challenge.

"Mighty few! You pick one up and think it's all right, but here's a little rotten spot, and you know—ef you know anything (and some women don't seem to) that there spot is goin' to spread. Then where's your apple? . . . Then you come to one that you'd swear was good and firm clear through until you find a teensy weensy hole, and then you see there's a worm there, a-gnawin' its way in and in and in, jes' for all the world like one of them secret sins that David talked to the Lord about—*at the wrong time.* . . . Well, you know that apple ain't no good, for by the time you've cut out that worm *and the tracks it's made,* you've kinder lost yo' appetite for apples!

"We won't say nothin' about them kind that's fair lookin' on the outside and rotten at the core—they are too bad to talk about—but they are in the load! You know that, Mr. McLain."

"They are there," he assented.

"Of course, some folks would say women oughter look 'em over beforehand and find out; but I tell you *a woman hasn't got a even chanct with a man at findin' out*—and that's the Lord's truth! She can't have, for half of 'em marries strangers that they don't know nothin' about—nothin' but their looks—and looks don't count for much after you're married and got down to business! . . . Women can't know! Do you s'pose I'd ever a-married Debo and trusted him with Sandy ef I'd a-knowed about his devil's temper? No, sir! But you see he helt it in till we was married and he could

safely let it out in the 'sacred family circle,' that Dr. Dabney talks so beautiful about."

"He didn't find it altogether safe then, did he?"

"No. He didn't. But the trouble was when I found out—it was too late." Her features worked painfully again in the grotesque way she had of strangling emotion. "Of course I dropped him,—but that didn't straighten Sandy's back."

McLain felt like a brute to have led back to this.

"And it ain't jes' women like me—away down, as you may say, that marries without knowin' the man and what he is. 'Better marry one of the neighbour boys,' I always tell 'em. 'It's safter. Then you know what you're gittin'.' Now, you may not think that's very polite, seein' as you ain't one of the neighbour boys—but you can't say it ain't good sense. Let's suppose a case. S'posin' you and Jean Dabney was to take a shine to one another, and——"

"I think we will not suppose that," he said, quietly. "Confine yourself to apples—or the neighbour boys."

"Yes, we *will* s'pose that. It ain't goin' to do no harm, and it'll show you what I mean."

She stepped to the door leading into the hall and closed it, and he made no more protest.

"Now as I was sayin', s'pose you and Jean was to think of something serious. Well, ef you had half a notion of how serious it was, you'd want to be findin' out something about one another. You wouldn't take no risk! Jean Dabney's life is jest as plain before you as that there winder-pane, and as clear to look through. You're in her home; you know her folks; and you can jedge of the stock she's come from, even to their housekeepin'. No, you wouldn't be takin' no chances! But turn it the other way round, and what would Jean know? . . . Well, she could tell you was good-lookin', even with a bandage on. She would know that you can talk mighty interestin', and jedgin' from yo' manners and

yo' dictionary way of talkin' that yo' maw was a mighty nice lady (and I for one am most sure of that); and she would know that you was kind-hearted and had a way of gittin' into people's hearts—even when them hearts was tough as turkey gizzards, like mine,—but what chance would she ever have to find out what you was back of them things—they ain't nothin' but the outside of the apple! I say, how would she find out what you air? and where you've lived? and what you was up to while you was there? Why, she couldn't get at the meat and core and reely know that you was sound; for all she'd know, you might be a bigamous, or a Mormon."

She had been busy jabbing her needle back and forth in a much darned stocking, which needed close attention. She glanced up now, however, amused and expecting him to be amused at the conceit of his being a Mormon.

"Why, Mr. McLain!" she cried, startled at the pallor of his face. "I am ashamed of myself! Me a-settin' up to be a nurse and then talkin' a patient to death with my foolishness. Well, I'm glad Dr. Llewellyn ain't here! Why didn't you tell me you was tired? . . . Here, you take a little sip of this wine. And then you lay back in your cheer and go to sleep. I'll pull down the shade. . . . Why, I'm so 'shamed! . . . You look plumb tuckered out!"

VII

ON THE PORCH

BEFORE he saw Jean's face again the lilacs had spent themselves and the old snowball tree had blossomed out one mass of white. Out on the borders Miss Lavinia's peonies could not contain themselves. The daffodils and hyacinths and tulips had long since put up their shutters and gone out of business.

The time was long enough for McLain to have been promoted to crutches, a place on the porch, and a *valet*. The first two came in the ordinary course of nature; the last was by inspiration.

The young man had made good his promise to see after Sandy's education. Miss Lavinia had looked up some old school books of Jean's, and daily the lad presented himself for lessons, proving both apt and eager.

About this time Mrs. Debo had had a call to another case—a dangerous one—and to Mrs. Debo as to some physicians the scent of danger was the trumpet call. The case which elicited her best efforts was the one that appealed to her.

"You don't really need a nurse now, anyway," she told her patient, "and yet you need somebody to wait on you."

"Leave me Sandy, and you may go. I'll keep Sandy as a *valet*."

"You are the last person in the world I would have expected to hear call a cripple names," she answered, deeply wounded.

When he had made his peace with her by an appeal to Dr. Dabney the plan was agreed upon, to the boy's

unbounded satisfaction. In opening up to the hunchback the possibility of his entering the world of books McLain had let loose an imprisoned soul. He was in reality a sturdy lad in spite of his affliction, seeing which McLain, with ready tact, made use of every opportunity to emphasize that strength and his own weakness. For poor Sandy the emphasis had hitherto been laid the other way, and his pleasure in being able to lend his shoulder for the support of a man two feet above him was touching.

"Why, you're strong, boy," said McLain, bearing down hard, "strong and tough as a pine knot!"

Sandy's face shone. After that they walked the porch daily, and the boy's eyes followed his master with the dumb devotion of an animal.

On the porch Archer McLain formed the acquaintance of the neighbourhood—the Cartwrights, the Bascoms, the Davidsons, and others—simple, honest country folk they were, full of kindly sympathy for the young man stranded in their midst. He started to withdraw when the first visitor appeared, but Dr. Dabney protested so urgently that he abandoned the thought. It dawned upon him later that the man's call might have been intended in part for himself, a supposition in which he was afterwards confirmed by his host.

"But why should they take any interest in me?" he asked.

"Because you are a stranger and in trouble," answered the minister, simply.

"In trouble? You mean my leg?"

"Certainly. What else could I mean?"

After this McLain met the doctor's visitors with a frank pleasure and a keen interest in agricultural matters that won him many friends among them. He had that way of throwing himself into the life and interest of others which amounts to a gift with some persons and always makes for popularity.

One day when Mr. Cartwright was there the conversation turned upon the sheep industry in the West.

"Did you ever see a sheep-wagon, Mr. Cartwright?" McLain asked.

"No, sir, I can't say I have."

"That's not strange, for it is a Western institution, and you say your life has been passed here in Missouri."

"What is it?"

"A sheep-herder's home on wheels. You know there is a great amount of grazing land in the West and sheep raising is a profitable industry. In the spring the sheep are taken into the mountains, advancing higher and higher as snow recedes, until in midsummer they graze among the grassy valleys of the mountain ranges and on the cool, high plateaus. As winter approaches they gradually retire to lower levels, and by the time of general snowfall they are roaming over low, broad ranges, where the native bunch grass, matured through the summer, is waiting for them.

"Well, the sheep-wagon is an outgrowth of these conditions. With it the herder can lead his flock up the mountains or down the mountains as he pleases and not have so much as to set up his tent to be at home."

"How does it differ from other wagons?"

"At first glance you would think it was an ordinary mover's wagon, but a closer inspection discloses some points of difference."

"The lack of tow-headed children, for one thing, I suppose," suggested Mr. Cartwright.

"Exactly. And the dragged-out looking woman, for another. It is an unusually long, broad, well-covered wagon, but it has some unique features. Above the wheels, and high enough to clear them, is a projection of about fifteen inches on each side. As the wagon bows are fastened to the outer edge of this projection the width of the inside is materially increased and two good seats provided at the sides. Broad strips of wood

running lengthwise (of similar material as the bows and fastened firmly to them) make a stout framework for the top, and the whole is covered with a heavy canvas so securely fastened down that there is no danger of flapping edges, to give entrance to the wind, for this is a house, you understand, and for pretty high altitudes."

"A house without windows, of course."

"No, sir! A house with windows. The one I am describing had four,—a window about a foot square on each side and another in the tightly stretched canvas that formed the back. This is to light the bunk that goes across the end. Sometimes there are two bunks and two windows one above the other. A door in two sections closes the front of this vehicle as snugly as a house and in the upper section is another window."

"That certainly is curious."

"It really is. The wagon has every appearance of a canvas house on wheels, especially when from the stovepipe in its top is seen issuing smoke."

"A stove too?"

"Oh, yes; there's always a cook stove, bolted down so as to be secure, and then under the wagon is a padlocked receptacle for provisions. You see, a sheepherder's wagon is his private car in which he eats, sleeps, cooks, and lives. It affords him not only transportation but shelter; and it is fitted up with as much economy of space as a Pullman car. Oh, I forgot to tell you about the table. Most of them have a swing table that is drawn up to the top when not in use, and can be lowered at will. It is convenient not only at meal-time but at night if the herder wants to read."

"Say, doctor," said Mr. Cartwright, turning to the minister after some further talk about stock raising, "this is no city man. He's a farmer!"

McLain laughed. He had used his stockman's lore to the best possible advantage, and indeed the amount of it was somewhat surprising to Dr. Dabney himself,

who had never happened to hear him on this subject before.

"Mr. McLain," he said, after Mr. Cartwright was gone, "your knowledge of the sheep industry is a surprise to me. Where in the world did you get it?"

A closer observer might have noticed a momentary embarrassment in the young man at the question. Then he replied breezily:

"The wagon I had an opportunity once to observe rather closely, and I have never forgotten it. The rest is theoretical—largely—and like most theoretical knowledge passes for more than it is worth. The truth of the matter is that I was once in a place where I had a good deal of time on my hands and some old Agricultural Reports. I got interested in the subject in that way. . . . By the way, where is this old Bascom place that Mr. Cartwright was speaking about? The one that is to be sold. It isn't Mr. John Bascom's?"

"No. It is the old home place. It was sold at the time of Major Bascom's death—that's John's father, you understand—to a Mr. Olmstead; but he has never been able to meet the payments, and his sudden death a few months ago throws the place back on John's hands."

"Is it much of a farm?"

"It is a good farm—none better in this neighbourhood—but it has run down. Mr. Olmstead was not much of a manager, and then latterly I imagine he got discouraged."

"I see. How far is it from here?"

"About a mile. Over in this direction."

"Where you can see the light at night?" asked McLain, eagerly.

"I don't know but you can see the lights from the upper windows. I rather think you can. You can get a glimpse of the house itself in the winter. It is rather too leafy now."

"I've often noticed that place. Yes, I can see the light from my window. How are the buildings?"

"Unusually good, though John tells me they are out of repair like the farm. The house is an old-fashioned one, I suppose you would say, but well-built and on a generous scale. I think there is a small tenant house on the place now—one that Mr. Olmstead put up. The house stands in a natural grove of oaks and the porches are covered with roses. It is a pity to see a place like that run down. The old Bascom place is one of the landmarks in this neighbourhood. John tells me they are anxious to sell. Rented farm property is a poor investment."

He took up the *Christian Observer* that had been laid aside for the visitor and was soon absorbed in its contents. McLain too took up his paper but not to read. A startling, persistent thought had taken possession of him. When the doctor looked up at the turning of a page McLain interrupted:

"How large is the tenant house?"

"Beg pardon. The tenant house? What tenant house?"

"On the Bascom place."

"Oh! Four or five rooms, I think John said. Why?"

"Nothing. Not having much to do actively just now I am cultivating an interest in my neighbours' affairs."

Dr. Dabney laid down his paper with a contrite feeling that he was neglecting a guest.

"It has been rather hard for you, Mr. McLain, to be cooped up here with two old people like my sister and myself. The young need the young. I am glad to say that Genevieve will be back to-morrow. When she comes and you are well enough she shall drive you over to see the old Bascom place. In rose season it is worth the drive."

It was on the porch that McLain ran again across

the name of Zeb Horn, which for some reason had a strange sort of fascination for him. Sandy had been talking with the doctor about the proposed plan of his learning the shoemaker's trade, which the minister strongly endorsed. When the boy was gone McLain asked, "Who is this Zeb Horn, doctor?"

"A most unfortunate man in our midst who has a reputation that I think is entirely undeserved. But you know the old adage, 'Give a dog a bad name,' etc."

A bitter smile curved McLain's lips. "I know!"

"Undoubtedly the man has had a past that is unfortunate, but it would have to be something very heinous to justify the persistent ostracism to which he has been subjected since he has been here. I shall never forget the first time I ever saw him. It was in church. You know we have a gallery in our church building which was used long ago by the negroes. It has fallen into disuse since the war, because they worship now in their own little log church. Well, my attention was attracted one Sunday by seeing a man slip quietly into the back seat of the gallery—a white man. He had evidently come up the back stairway and did not wish to be observed. He was perfectly safe, for no one could see him but myself. (This was before the choir was given a place beside the pulpit.)

"I was giving out the hymn, 'Rock of Ages,' when he sat down. I never shall forget the intensity of his attention during the reading nor his emotion during the singing. Evidently it touched some tender chord. Those old hymns do, you know."

McLain made a quick gesture with his head, but did not speak.

"Mr. McLain, I shall always be glad that my sermon that day was on the love of God! We ministers never know but there may be among our hearers a trembling soul! I had written that sermon for my congregation, as I supposed,—but I preached it to the man in the gal-

lery. During the long prayer he had slipped a few seats nearer. At its close I gave out again the hymn, 'Rock of Ages.' I could see that the choir was disconcerted, but I said to them, 'I wish to sing this hymn again.' And I added the invitation, which I often give, that if there was any soul present who felt his need of such a refuge he would come to it to-day—and would in some way indicate his choice.

"At the third verse

> "'Nothing in my hand I bring,
> Simply to thy cross I cling;'

the man rose, stood a moment, and then dropped back into his seat. When the prayer was finished he was gone. I found out afterward that it was Zeb Horn, of whom I had at that time hardly heard."

"You have talked with him since?"

"Yes. But he is very reticent." Then he said in a half-apologetic tone, "I don't know why I should have told you this, Mr. McLain. I certainly did not intend to when I began. I have never related this before to any one."

"I am glad to have heard it, doctor. It was evidently a vital experience with the man."

"Unquestionably. I found afterwards that he had not supposed he was observed."

"H-m!"

McLain found himself wondering often in the next few days about the man's history, of which Dr. Dabney gave no hint. He determined that as soon as he was able to ride he would go down to the shoemaker's.

When Jean came they settled at once into their old pleasant relations.

"Why did you stay so long?" he asked, reproachfully. "You said a week and it has been forty."

"Three, lacking a day," she corrected. "And I said a week or *two*."

"I am not speaking of calendar weeks, but the passage of time."

"Poor fellow!" she mocked. "I am afraid they haven't treated you well."

"They have treated me far beyond my just deserts. Miss Lavinia has read the Bible to me until I know it by heart; your father has prayed me downstairs; and my nurse has handed me over to a varlet."

"A *what?*"

"A varlet. Haven't you heard about my varlet? Well, it is Sandy. Would you ever have thought it? You see, his mother objected to his being called a *valet*, seeing in it some hidden reference to his size, and when I told her it was French, and spelled the word for her and your father confirmed it—you see how far my word goes—she agreed very willingly that Sandy should be *it*, but since she was American she would call it plain varlet as it ought to be. She has since adopted the word with some pride, I believe, and uses it to astonish the natives on the creek—always explaining that it is French. But even with a varlet I needed you. I wanted you."

There was such evident truth under his bantering words that they thrilled her.

"I left you Mr. Maltby's books," she laughed, with heightened colour.

"Maltby's books! What are another fellow's books to you when what you are wanting to see is the girl he sent them to? I began half a dozen of them, but they had no flavour. They were not half so good as your magazine stories. It was like eating unsalted rice after a sauce *piquante*."

"You nonsensical creature! Here, give me one of those books and let me see what's the matter with it."

The reading went on blithely as the weeks sped by. The number of volumes read was not great, but some-

how they both felt that they were having a full course. And a porch in Missouri in May is such a delightful place. The orchard over at the left, which they could have in full sight by going around to the south piazza, was a shifting panorama of colour. One week when the peach trees had their day it was a glory of pink; the next, the scene was shifted and the plum trees had on their bridal robes; and then before they had quite had their fill of these the screen unrolled on something fairer yet in the unapproachable blossoms of the old apple orchard with its delicate sea-shell tints. Jean kept his table filled with them, and then when he declared that the apple blossoms were unsurpassed and unsurpassable she helped him down to the pasture where the crab apples were, just to prove that he had not exhausted the category of rural affluence.

He sent her to the house then for twine, and while she read he sat on the grass propped up against the tree trunk and made a wreath of the pink blossoms and laid it on her bent head with mock humility and did her and the blossoms homage in very truth.

It was really quite bearable, this convalescence,—so much so that he was tempted sometimes to prolong it indefinitely, and might have done so—not being over strict in bringing himself to account, had it not been for the wholesome fear of Dr. Llewellyn's sharp eyes. It must be admitted that there are some mitigating features about an illness that permits a young man of twenty-five to lie at ease in a reclining chair on a shady piazza, held by an ankle that no longer pains him, listening to love stories read by a young woman of twenty with hair of reddish brown that catches the glint from every stray sunbeam filtering through the wistaria. He found himself watching for it as he lay there listening to the soft cadences of her voice, his attention quite impartially divided between the text, the glint, and the soft bloom on her cheek that rivalled the apple blossoms.

Jean was giving up a good deal of her time to him these days, for of course the hours *were* heavy on his hands, and there were the forty weeks to make up to him. They found among Mr. Maltby's contributions several new books that must be begun at once. The reading was not continuous by any means. Often it led to discussions of this or that involved in the story,—discussions which led off into highways and byways of discursive talk until they were at a loss sometimes to discover the track that had led them to this particular station and were obliged to take short cuts across country to the point from which they started.

But the byways are pleasanter oftentimes than the broad road. They came to know each other through these readings, or more truthfully, these talks. The intelligent discussion of a book between two persons of sympathetic tastes reveals them each to the other as months of ordinary surface intercourse does not. They feel, and not unjustifiably, that each has gained, in this impersonal way, entrance into the sanctuary of the other's inner thoughts.

What a relentless critic Jean was! How ruthlessly she tore the helpless characters to pieces, usually the youthful hero or heroine, but now and then even old grizzled men and women as well in her impatience at motives governing them—motives which as yet were undreamed of in the philosophy of her one score years. Ah! how much less we know, and how much less confidently we know that little after a lifetime of thought than at the beginning!

They were sitting one night all together at family prayers, which the good doctor always had early, mainly for the convenience of the servants, but partly because this arrangement left each member of the family free to follow his untrammelled inclinations afterwards, whithersoever they led him—the doctor's piety not being

of that ascetic type which makes a virtue of mortifying other people's flesh.

But the evening prayer was as inevitable as dawn or sunset. As priest of his own household Dr. Dabney expected the attendance upon this service of all, whatever the condition or colour; this being satisfied, they were exempt thereafter from call or fear of intrusion upon their inner life, for the obtrusion of his religious convictions upon anybody under his roof was no part of the good doctor's conception of duty to God or his neighbour. He had family worship as he had breakfast, and would no sooner have thought of omitting the service for the reason that a guest was unaccustomed to it than he would have thought it expedient to dispense with the morning meal because that guest had fallen a victim to the "no breakfast fad." The offering of daily spiritual manna was a part of the hospitality of the house.

To the custom—while a little inclined to smile at it at first—McLain felt no repulsion. In fact, it rather pleased his æsthetic fancy to see the patriarchal gathering night and morn; to listen to the stately measures of Hebrew poetry as they fell from the lips of this white-haired prophet of the nineteenth century. There was something very picturesque in the group of negro servants over in the corner—three generations—from withered old Uncle Ephraim to the children, who came in bringing with them their little split-bottomed chairs, wherein they sat with great decorum and wildly rolling eyes. It was an epoch in the lives of little Ephraim's children when they were old enough to be promoted to "pra'r's."

During McLain's confinement to his room the coloured contingent had been excused from attendance, but with his coming downstairs the old order was restored. He was unaccustomed to both worship and negroes, and the element of novelty, combined with the pleasurable sensation incident to singing from the same book with Jean

Dabney, made the devotional hour altogether enjoyable to him.

On this night he was preoccupied. He had been dreaming dreams out on the porch as Jean read, dreams about the old Bascom place; what he could do with it as a farm with money; what he could make of it as a home—with a helper. The thought had been gaining in force for days, and to-night he was completely possessed by it. Miss Lavinia had told of the flower garden and its glories in Mother Bascom's day; how the dear old lady coming there a bride had walked its paths for forty years. And now it was going the way of all uncared for things! In imagination he saw it restored and another walking there a bride, and might it be for forty years? With this thought beating in his soul, his outer ear caught the words falling from the minister's lips:

"The trespass money and sin money was not brought into the house of the Lord."

The context was lost to him completely. These words stood off by themselves as an island stands in the midst of the waters, and as if to emphasize them still more the doctor read them again thoughtfully: "The trespass money and sin money was not brought into the house of the Lord."

Then without warning he turned to his guest.

"Would you consider that an argument against the use of 'tainted money,' Mr. McLain?"

Archer McLain caught his breath.

"I—I beg your pardon, doctor," he stammered, conscious of Jean's amused eyes upon him, "I hardly think —I am—qualified——"

The good doctor perceived his embarrassment.

"It almost seems as if that passage might be so construed," he said, quietly, and resumed the reading, to which McLain gave diligent though perturbed heed, without so much as a glance in Jean's direction.

On the porch he burst forth with his grievance.

"See here! Is your father liable to scare a fellow to death that way often?"

"Almost any time," returned Jean, composedly. "Has he never asked your opinion about a passage of Scripture before?"

"*Never!*"

"Not all the time I was gone?"

"*No.* Why should he?"

"Well, he is likely to at any time."

"*Heavens!* And I with a broken leg! Why, hasn't your father discrimination enough to see that I am not a commentator?"

Jean's pent up laughter bubbled over, but she replied at last with greatest gravity, "To my father all persons are possible commentators. He supposes that every intelligent person reads the Bible and has an opinion about what he reads. And he feels as free to call on you for yours as you would be to ask for mine about a novel."

"Why, this is fearful!" he declared. "I shall never feel easy a moment again at prayers!"

"Oh, he won't ask you questions if he knows you feel that way."

"Well, *tell him!* Go up now and tell him. I don't want to take any chances. Why, I felt as if even the African corner was laughing at me!"

"I didn't see anybody laugh."

"I did," he said, meaningly, and she bubbled over again.

"Well, you did look so scared!"

"Anybody would look scared. What are the 'trespass money and sin money' anyway? How should I know about them?"

"By study of the Scriptures—the same way father knows."

For some reason it was not the funny thing to him it was to her. "The 'sin money,'" he repeated. "How

did he happen to hit on that? And why was he interested in it?"

"That's very easy to see. Father has been much interested in this discussion in the religious papers about the advisability of institutions of learning and churches accepting gifts of so-called 'tainted money.' You've seen it, of course. He happened to come across a passage in the ordinary course of his reading that he thought bore on the subject and he wanted to get your opinion."

"Yes, my opinion would be so valuable! I don't even know what 'sin money' is. What is it?"

"You might ask father," she suggested.

"Not on your life! This is a closed incident. I want it so understood. . . . 'Sin money'!"

"I suppose this does seem queer to you, Mr. McLain, but it doesn't to me because I am accustomed to it. If father has never asked us any questions since you have been here it has only happened so. He often does. And he turns to the negroes with a word of explanation any time at all.

"You see, the Bible is to my father the ultimate authority and rule of conduct. Everything in his life is squared by it. It is of the utmost importance to him therefore that his household should understand it, and whenever an explanatory word or a question will elucidate its meaning he does not hesitate to give the one or ask the other. This makes our worship very informal——"

"Informal! I should say so!"

"——but my father's religion is too much a part of himself to leave room for formality. It is ingrained. He believes as fully that God is our dear Heavenly Father watching over us and caring for us as he cares for me;—that the Bible is His word to teach us how to live as you believe in the air you breathe and the ground you walk on. It is a simple, old-fashioned faith —but it has made my father what he is."

"And it is your faith as well?"

"Yes," she said after a moment's hesitation, a faint flush overspreading her face. She felt that there was a lurking inclination behind the question to make light of it all. And therein she did him injustice.

"Yes, it is mine too. But if it were not mine I should honour it just the same, because it is his. I have never known a mother, Mr. McLain. I revere my father beyond any living being. His religious faith is as sacred to me as—as your mother's prayers are to you."

He dropped his head into his hands.

"Don't speak of her!" he cried, passionately. "I broke my mother's heart!"

Poor Jean sat in shocked silence. At last she forced herself to speak.

"Mr. McLain, I am *so* sorry! I don't know what I have done, but you must know I didn't mean to hurt you."

He raised his eyes to hers. "You haven't done anything. And I was a brute to speak as I did. I hope you will never think of it again. It was only that you inadvertently touched a raw spot. . . . My mother, Miss Dabney, was to me all that your father is to you. I—I did something once that was a great grief to her. I can't tell you about that now. If I could have talked with her myself I think I could have made her understand—but—she died before I could get to her."

The hopeless pain in the man's face touched her more than his passionate outburst of a moment before.

"She knows it all now, Mr. McLain, and she has forgiven, if there was anything to forgive—you may be sure of that."

"But I wanted to talk to her," he cried with something of his former vehemence, "just once—just once—until I could explain—could make her understand! . . . That was all I asked—and it was denied me!"

"She understands—and she forgives," the girl reiter-

ated with gentle insistence. "That's what fathers and mothers are for, I think—to 'forgive us our transgressions and love us freely.'"

"Sometimes I dream of her," he said in a low tone, after a long silence. "I can see her so plainly and she always has on her face that tender, yearning look she used to wear when I was a boy and had done something wrong. But the dream never goes any farther. When I reach out to touch her she is gone. . . . A strange thing happened to me here in this very house once. It was the day I first saw you, the morning I came to myself. I was lying in that semi-conscious state that morphine sometimes produces—seemingly asleep, but two-thirds awake. As I lay there it seemed to me I heard somebody say distinctly, 'My son!—my son!' I could have sworn it was a voice, but I could not rouse myself nor speak. The narcotic held me. When finally I did wake there was nobody there but your aunt. It is foolish, but it makes me happier whenever I think of it. It seemed almost as if she wanted to say, 'I know.'"

Recollection stirred thus, he told her much about his family and his early life in the East—of his father, whom he but dimly remembered; of the little sister who had died, leaving him the only child; but most of all of his mother and all she had been to him.

Then she confided to him how she too had all her life lacked the companionship of a sister or a brother and had longed for it, but how she had been, like him, forced back upon herself and the love of the one parent left. After such confidences two persons are never quite the same in their relations to one another. Her sympathy had been of that divine kind that opened his heart and unsealed his lips, and when he told her simply, without making any appeal for sympathy, of his utter lack of family and his loneliness in the world, she felt infinite pity for him—the pity that was then, is now, and ever shall be, akin to love.

"Let us be brother and sister to each other from this time on," she said, earnestly.

And he agreed to this with a half-smile which the darkness covered, admitting to himself that it was as much as he should ask, but knowing in his heart of hearts that it was far from what his soul craved.

VIII

ZEB HORN

AT Mr. Freno's, down on the creek, a domestic tempest was brewing.

"Sally Ann, what in the name er sense do you s'pose is keepin' yo' paw? He 'lowed he'd be here by twelve o'clock, and here it is nearly one. It *is* the most aggravatin' thing to get a meal er victuals ready and have nobody here to eat it! That chicken will be plumb ruint! What do you s'pose he's doin'?"

"Talkin'," said Sally Ann, laconically, her chair tilted back comfortably against the wall. She was making tatting out of No. 70 cotton for a full set of underclothes and had no time for words or worry.

"Well, I've no patience with people that are everlastingly talkin'," said Mrs. Freno, severely, in manifest violation of her own principles. "Yo' paw would ruther tell a story than eat, any day. . . . Now, look at them flies!"—with increasing irritation. "You, Bud!"—to the boy on the horse-blocks—"bring me a limb. And then you set thar and holler when you see yo' paw."

Bud brought the limb—a branch from the locust tree which was the country fly-brush of a screenless section; and Mrs. Freno, taking a seat at the waiting table, gave herself up to keeping off the flies.

The table was set on the porch, which running as it did the length of two rooms and a passage and being a matter of twelve or fifteen feet in width was ample even for the multitudinous uses to which it was put. The east end was kept sacred to dining-room purposes, Mrs. Freno declaring that she would not have any

" plunder " around the table; but the condition of things further down—the pile of carpet-rags which the good lady had been assorting and cutting, the winding-blades filled with hanks of white rags ready for dyeing, and the bags of balls hanging from the steelyards—indicated that " plunder " was not tabooed on this back porch, but only kept within bounds.

A big wheel was at the other end, and two or three saddles, male and female, were thrown over the joists, their stirrups bringing them within easy reach. A scythe or two hung on the wall, and beside them two faded, mud-spattered riding skirts.

It was an old-time country porch in Missouri, where the family lived and moved and had their being. It served as sitting-room, dining-room, work-room, and bath—for over Sally Ann's head was a small looking-glass with a yellow pasteboard comb-case under it, and at the edge of the porch was a rude shelf that held the wash basin and a cedar bucket with a gourd in it. The gourd was dark and water-soaked, with a dank, musty smell which comes back vividly to one after a happy oblivion of no matter how many years! Nobody could have told why it was used until it got into this condition, for certainly there were plenty of gourds. There was a bunch of them all ready for use hanging against the wall, and mammoth ones used as receptacles for all sorts of things were sitting around. Mrs. Freno had a family of young chickens in one, and up in the corner was a giant half filled with eggs. The Frenos called them " hen-aigs."

The owner of all this wealth switched her brush vigorously, being in that state of irritation which always leads a woman to attack something when dinner is waiting. Just then Bud announced, " Paw's comin'," and she rose.

By the time dinner was on the table Mr. Freno had emerged, dripping and sputtering, from the wash basin,

to retire into the folds of the family towel; and when Ma'-'Liza, the ewe lamb of the Freno flock, who appeared at this moment moist and rosy from her morning nap, had been cuddled a moment and then settled in her high chair, he gave a final "roach" to his wet looks before the crinkly glass, and gravely took his seat.

Mrs. Freno had sat opposite her spouse at table for twenty years, and knew him, as she often averred, like a book—which was not saying much, after all, for her knowledge of books was more limited than her knowledge of any other earthly thing—and when his voice sank in asking the blessing a note or two below its usual unintelligible pitch, and he forgot to say "Amen," she divined that something was the matter. So she prudently husbanded the prepared "piece of her mind," and asked only:

"What kep' you?"

"I had to serve on a coroner's jury. Zeb Horn's dead."

"Zeb Horn! You don't say so! When did he die? What was the matter with him? How did you hear about it?"

Mr. Freno was accustomed to beginning at the last of his wife's questions, and by a sort of back action working his way through them one by one. Accordingly, he answered:

"It seems that Drusilla Debo has been thinkin' about puttin' that crippled boy of hern in with Zeb Horn to learn the shoemaker's trade, and she went over thar this mornin' to talk with him about it. She knocked at the do', but nobody answered and she said she jes' made so bold as to raise the latch and walk in. Thar laid Zeb, stiff and cold, in bed with a quilt drawed up around him like he was asleep."

"Dead?"

"Yes. Well,—Druse Debo has got as much sense, pretty near, as a man"—in the excitement of the narra-

tive Mrs. Freno let this pass—" and she got on her horse and went straight for the coroner—he lives near thar, you know—and he got a jury together and we went over to Zeb's and looked things over and brought in a verdict."

"And what was it?"

"That he died a natch'ul death."

"Was it heart disease?"

"No, the doctor didn't think so."

"What doctor?"

"Dr. Llewellyn. He happened to be down at old Mrs. Dunklin's and they called him in."

"Oh, well, William Llewellyn would know. I thought maybe it was that snip of a fellow that goes around with his little sugar pills. Did Dr. Llewellyn think it was apoplexy?"

"Apoplexy! No. No man ever had apoplexy that looked like Zeb Horn. Why, he was jes' skin and bones."

Mrs. Freno leaned forward with a horror-stricken face.

"Ad'niram Freno! You don't s'pose Zeb Horn starved to death?"

"My Lord, Marthy!" returned Mr. Freno, testily. "What makes you look at me that-a-way? *I* don't know what was the matter with Zeb Horn any more'n you do! But I know he didn't starve to death, for the cupboard had groceries in it that hadn't never been opened. On the table by him was a bag of oranges and some port wine."

"Port wine! and oranges! Why, somebody must a-took him them things."

"I reckon he got the groceries jes' befo' he taken sick."

"Has he been sick? How do you know he's been sick?"

"Lige Coyt was one of the jury and he said Dr. Dabney stopped at his house on his way over to Big

Bethel (you know he's holdin' a protracted meetin' over thar), and he told Lige he had jes' come from Zeb's and he was mighty po'ly, and some of the neighbours better go in and see him, and Lige said he fully 'lowed to do it, but he put it off till the next day (you know what a putter-off Lige is), and then something come up and he clean forgot it."

"And nary a soul went near him all the time he was sick?"

"As I told you, nary a soul knowed he was sick but Lige, and he disremembered it."

Mrs. Freno shut her lips tight.

"In a Christian land! If I'd had my way,"—significantly—"Zeb Horn would a-been settin' here to-day at this table!"

"Now, Marthy,"—Mr. Freno spoke impatiently, as if some chord of self-reproach had been touched—"what makes you always bring that up? You know I didn't want to turn Zeb off, but what was I to do? The thrashers jes' said p'intedly they wouldn't work ef Zeb stayed. I couldn't let 'em go off in the midst of thrashin'."

"He was one of the best hands we ever had," said his wife.

"Yes, he was *so*. I never saw a faithfuller hand than Zeb Horn. I never turnt him off because he wan't faithful—Zeb knowed that—but the thrashers jes' said up and down they wan't goin' to work with a felon."

"Paw, what was it Zeb Horn done?" asked Sally Ann.

"Well, I really don't know, honey, what it was. Some says he stole a horse, and some says he was a counterfeiter, and——"

"Well, I don't care what they say," said Mrs. Freno, with decision, "I know Zeb Horn wan't a bad man. Ma'-'Liza never would a-took to him like she did ef he had been. Chil'n has instincts, same as animals, and she took to Zeb from the start. Sally Ann, do you remem-

ber how he used to tote her up and down the porch and down to the milkin' pen; and how she'd put her arms around his neck and call him her Zebbie?"

And Ma'-'Liza, stirred to remembrance by the recital and not at all comprehending what was the matter, looked up with clouded brow and repeated, "Ma'-'Liza love Zebbie."

"Zeb was a awful good hand to make traps," said Bud, regretfully. "He made 'em last winter for all us boys till you-all found we was goin' over there and stopped us."

"He was mighty trusty about the stock," said Mr. Freno.

"And the kindest-hearted thing to animals of all kinds," added his wife. "Thar wan't a dumb brute on the place but would foller him around. And he liked it. I used to think it was kind of company for him. . . . Poor Zeb! . . . Has he been laid out yet?"

"No. Ben Tolles and me 'lowed we'd go over after dinner and 'tend to it. You might go over too, Marthy, and see about cleanin' up a little. Bud can saddle old Kit for you. . . . He ain't really got anything to be laid out in," he continued, "but a pa'r old jeans pants and a hickory shirt. Haven't I got a old pa'r black pants, Marthy, I could take over, and a white shirt?"

Mrs. Freno cast her eyes toward a garment swinging back and forth from a nail in the joist just above the carpet rags.

"I *was* layin' off to use them pants for the black and white stripe in my cyarpet," she said, a trifle reluctantly, "but I don't know. . . . I s'pose I could have it plain hit and miss. . . . Only I've laid off all along to have a twisted stripe—but——"

"Well, I wouldn't send 'em then," said Mr. Freno, with sympathetic understanding of his wife's feelings; "you've set your heart on it, and it won't really make no difference to Zeb, nohow."

This decided Mrs. Freno.

"Ad'niram," she said, firmly, "I wouldn't let a feller mortal go to the grave in brown jeans pants if I never had a twisted stripe to my dying day."

With Mrs. Freno renunciation could go no farther.

Meantime—who was Zeb Horn? What had he done?

Nobody could tell. All that was known of him was that a few years ago he had come to the Tinkling Spring neighbourhood asking for work. He was gaunt and ungainly, and had little in his personal appearance to recommend him, but he was an untiring worker. He could do more work, Mr. Cartwright declared, than any two men he ever had. But he was not a favourite with his fellow-workmen. He never talked, for one thing—never laughed and joked as the rest did—not, apparently, that he didn't want to, but that he didn't know how. He seemed somehow out of practice. He would open his mouth occasionally as if he contemplated saying something, but before he could get it out the stream of talk would have swept by him and left him stranded on the rock of silence.

Then he had a way of glancing over his shoulder as if he were expecting something or somebody to be there, which was commented upon quite freely by the other hands.

"It gives me the creeps," said Hank Miller one day, "to see Zeb Horn lookin' over his shoulder. What do you s'pose he 'lows to see?" He asked him one day. Zeb grew livid, but he only shook his head. He tried to break himself of it after that, but the power of habit is strong.

The man worked for Mr. Cartwright nearly a year. One day he was told that he would not be wanted any more. It was in the midst of corn-planting, and Zeb knew he couldn't well be spared, but Mr. Cartwright had spoken with averted face and so he asked no questions.

He got another place and stayed a month or so. Then his employer told him he had concluded to get another man. And so it went.

A little settlement had sprung up between the Tinkling Spring church and the creek—Henyon's store, a blacksmith shop, a shoemaker's, and a few houses. At last, in desperation, Zeb went to the shoemaker and asked for work. The man enquired where he had learned his trade. "Down south of here," Zeb had told him, his face as livid as before. The shoemaker needed help and he told him to put on his apron. So Zeb went to work making shoes.

He made them as if he were in practice. The shoemaker said curiously one day, "They certainly knowed how to make shoes down south whar you learnt your trade." His assistant merely nodded and went on with his work.

One day a customer came to the shop who, on leaving, beckoned to the shoemaker to follow him. They had a half-hour of talk at the horse-blocks. When the shoemaker returned, he said to Zeb:

"Whar did you say you learnt your trade?"

"I said I learnt it down south of here," Zeb replied, doggedly.

"I reckon you learnt it at Jefferson, didn't you?" asked the shoemaker, with quiet significance.

"Yes," said the man, laying down his last and taking off his apron. "I did." He knew what it would come to.

"'Nough said. You know I can't have you here."

And Zeb went forth again.

He had lived, since he had been with the shoemaker, in an old log cabin on the edge of the little settlement. He was missing a few days after this, and when he came back he had a bench and a sign. He put the one in front of his window and nailed the other to the logs by the door. Custom came to him by degrees, for Zeb

was a good workman, and if he had only kept at it he might have made the old shoemaker rue the day when he was allowed to set up in opposition, but for some reason he always grew restless as spring came on and wanted to go back to the farm. Whether it was some farming instinct stirring within him, or a distaste for his trade, or just a human longing to be with his kind, it would be hard to say; but something led him when the fit was on to throw down his apron and stride over the country looking for work.

Mr. Freno had taken him one summer, and finding him a valuable man had kept him a year—in fact until the threshers demanded his discharge. This had been a happy time for Zeb. Mrs. Freno was kind, if sharp-tongued, and he had won the mother's heart by his devotion to her baby. He was Ma'-'Liza's abject slave, and that young lady rewarded his fealty by showering upon him the wealth of her affections. There is nothing like a child's love to thaw out the frozen recesses of a human heart. In its warm sunshine Zeb grew almost like other men. Then came the threshers, the discharge, and the shoemaker's bench again.

And this is literally all that was known of Zeb Horn.

When Mrs. Freno reached the little cabin, bundle in hand, the two men had just finished their work. All that was mortal of Zeb Horn lay on two boards supported by chairs. Mr. Freno stepped aside for his wife, who, after one astonished glance, turned to her husband.

"Where did you get them clothes?" For the dead man was clad in a full suit of blue serge, which to Mrs. Freno's uncritical eye seemed fresh from the tailor's.

"That young man that's sick up at Dr. Dabney's sent 'em over by Sandy. He must have heard about it from Druse, I reckon."

"H-m! Necktie and collar and all! Druse says he's a awful kind-hearted young man. He's the one that's

been learnin' Sandy. I'm so glad he sent 'em. They certainly do become Zeb!"

She stood a moment looking down at the still form. The shifting, restless eyes were quiet now under closed lids, the shambling figure was straight for once, and over all lay the dignity of death.

"Pore Zeb!" she said, softly. "Pore Zeb! He'll never have to worry now about what people think and do and say. He's gone before his judge, Mr. Tolles, and I reckon He knows how to make allowances a heap better than we do."

She covered the silent figure with the sheet taken from her bundle, and turned briskly to her husband.

"Now, Ad'niram,"—in her sharp, everyday tone—"you and Mr. Tolles had best get that bed down out of the way before anybody gets here. Bud's comin' with a couple of boxes and some boards presently and we can put 'em around for seats after I've got swep' up. Thar'll be a whole passel er folks here directly and no place to seat 'em."

The result justified the prophecy. By the time these arrangements were completed and the room in all its bareness was clean the first visitors appeared. Mrs. Freno, feeling it incumbent upon somebody to do the honours, advanced to meet them.

"Howdy, Mrs. Oxley," she said. "Howdy, Mandy. Howdy, Sis. Come right in and take seats. We haven't got any cheers to offer, but we've done the best we can with the boards. Take off your bonnets."

"I ain't got long to stay," replied Mrs. Oxley, taking off her gingham sunbonnet and settling herself for the afternoon. "I jes' come in to look at the corpse and hear about the buryin'. When is it goin' to be?"

"To-morrow. Ad'niram was jes' sayin'—Howdy, Mrs. Ham. Howdy, Bub—set down thar by yo' maw. I was jes' sayin', Mrs. Ham, that Ad'niram says Dr. Dabney was here jes' befo' I come and—walk right in, Mr.

Jimmery, and you too, Miss Ann. Why, you've had a right smart piece to come this hot day, haven't you? And you ain't lookin' very peart, Miss Ann, either."

"I'm enjoyin' very pore health this summer," said that lady. She took great comfort in it.

"You certainly are lookin' bad," sympathized Mrs. Freno. "Don't you think she is, Mrs. Ham?"

"She is *so*."

"Ef it had a-been me instead of Zeb Horn that was took off without any warnin' I wouldn't have been a bit surprised," said Miss Ann, gloomily.

"Well, I don't know, Miss Ann," put in Mrs. Oxley, cheerfully. "I've noticed them kind that's always complainin' gen'ally hangs on a long time. Howdy, honey," to a child at the door with another holding to her skirts—"come on in. Whose little girls are you?"

"Mrs. Nicholls's."

"Whar's yo' maw? Why didn't she come?"

"She's got a so' th'oat," said the child. "She washed her haid, and she taken cold in her tonsilitis. But she 'lowed she'd be well enough to go to the buryin' and she said for us to come over and find out what time it let in."

"Ten o'clock," answered Mrs. Freno. "You see," in explanation to the others—"there's no friends or anybody to wait for. . . . Yes'm. Dr. Dabney has jes' gone from here. He come in to see Zeb on his way home, without knowin' a word about it."

"Can we see him?" asked the child of Mrs. Ham, looking half-fearfully at the sheeted figure.

Mrs. Freno rose.

She had been first on the ground and she felt secretly that the matter of Ma'-'Liza's instincts made it eminently proper that she should be the one to "show the corpse."

"Come right along, Sis," she said, briskly, laying back the sheet. "Mrs. Oxley, jes' step thar to the do',

and call the men in whilst I've got the sheet off, will you?"

And they all filed in and took turns looking into the face, still in death, that they had avoided in life.

"He looks right natch'ul," commented Mrs. Ham, in the stereotyped phrase of the occasion.

"But seems like he's mighty pore," added Mrs. Oxley.

"Whar do you s'pose he got them clothes?" whispered Mandy Oxley to another girl.

"That man was the best hand I ever had," said Mr. Cartwright to Mr. Freno. A belated feeling of regret at having turned him off had brought him down here. "Yes, sir, he was so."

"I believe you," replied Mr. Freno, turning away and stepping decently to the door to shoot a stream of tobacco juice from his mouth. "He was the trustiest man about stock I ever saw."

Then the two men looked each other in the face and turned away rather confusedly. They had both discharged Zeb Horn without giving him a reason for it.

Old Mrs. Gee lingered about the rude bier. "He's jest about the age my Willie would be," she said to Mrs. Freno. Willie had died in early childhood, but memory has a way of tugging at withered heart-strings at times like this to see if there is any life in them. "I wonder if he's got any mother."

"He don't look to me like a bad man," said her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Sam Gee, studying attentively the motionless face. "I wonder what it was he done!"

"Well, whatever he done," said the widow Morris, "he was mighty kind in sickness. I don't know how I would a-got along when my Caleb had inflammatory rheumatiz ef it hadn't been for Zeb Horn. He was the patientest creetur! Cale would ruther have him set up with him than any of the other neighbours. I 'lowed to Cale comin' over here that the Lord wouldn't forgit

them nights when Zeb Horn come to stand in the jedgment."

"Well, Mrs. Morris, I don't see how you can hope so," said Mrs. Ham, severely. "Zeb Horn wan't a perfessor and he wan't even a church-goin' man, so fur as I know. He certainly didn't consort with the Babtis'es. But I've sometimes thought, Mrs. Morris, that you yourself ain't never had a realizin' sense of the danger of not comin' right out and out and bein' a perfessor."

"Maybe I ain't, Mrs. Ham," admitted Mrs. Morris, meekly. "I reckon you're right. But I've got a realizin' sense of how hard Cale was to take keer of, and some nights when I was jest about wore out, and Zeb Horn would come in and take the burden of it on hisself, I 'most felt that he was a possessor ef he wan't a perfessor."

"I don't see how you can talk so!" said Mrs. Ham. "I'd be afraid to!"

"Maw," whispered Pink Oxley, "what's a perfessor? Is it a good man?"

"No, it's—why, yes, of course—it's a—*go on out in the yard, Pink,*—this ain't no place for chil'en!"

"I s'pose from what Dr. Dabney said he's goin' to make a warnin' of him," pursued Mrs. Ham.

"He is! Did he say so?" demanded Mrs. Freno.

"I don't know as he exactly said so, but we drawed the inf'rence from what passed that he was goin' to, me and Mr. Ham did. We met him jest as he was goin' away from here, and I asked him right out ef he was going to allow him to be buried from his church. He said that he would be buried from the cabin here and he 'lowed that all he had to say he would say at the grave. He talked so kinder stern like that I s'picioned at onct what he was goin' to do. And it's right that he should," firmly, "it ain't often a preacher gets a chance to make a warnin' of a man, for 'most everybody's got some

THE AFTERNOON WORE AWAY, BUT THE GUESTS LINGERED

friends that has feelin's to be respected. Thar was old man Kiel—a meaner man never drawed breath—but thar set Mrs. Kiel, a good woman and a long-sufferin' one—and the girls. And what could the preacher do at makin' a warnin' of him? He didn't have no chance at him at all! But with Zeb Horn—yes, I think it's right!"

"Well, I don't know," said Mr. Freno, who was sitting in the door whittling. "It seems like takin' a sorter mean advantage of a man to make a warnin' of him when he's dead and can't talk back, don't it, now?" This was addressed to Mr. Cartwright.

"Does so!" said Mr. Cartwright, emphatically, with a man's sense of justice. "It does so!"

"I don't think so," said Mrs. Ham, firmly. "He ain't got any friends, and—why, honey, whar did you come from?" she broke off abruptly to say to Ma'-'Liza, who at this moment appeared in the doorway, her hands full of pink and blue larkspur.

Ma'-'Liza gave one look into her face, but deigned no reply. Truly, "chil'n has instincts." She walked straight across the room to her mother. "I binged some f'owers to Zebbie," she said.

The afternoon wore away, but the guests lingered. Not for many a long day had the "creekites" had such a social gathering. The men lounged around the yard and chewed and talked crops and politics, and the women gossiped inside. And in the midst of it all lay the silent man who had so lacked companionship in life!

Early the next morning the people from the creek began to arrive, and by nine o'clock the fence was lined with horses. The rumour had got around that Dr. Dabney was going to make a "warnin'" of Zeb Horn, and it seemed that everybody wanted to be warned.

At ten o'clock the pine coffin was brought out and put in Mr. Freno's wagon. Dr. Dabney followed in his

buggy alone, and Mr. Cartwright's surrey, with its two sleek mules, came next, by virtue of its being the only carriage in attendance. The wagons, well filled, followed; and men and women on horseback with the usual quota of colts, followed. They all dismounted at the cemetery gate,—only Mr. Freno's wagon going inside.

By the side of the fence was a luxuriant growth of alder, whose white blossoms caught Ma'-'Liza's eye. Her mother broke off a branch for her and another for herself. Then, of course, every other woman had to do the same for her child and herself.

The grave was in a lonely part of the graveyard, away from all the others. They formed silently around it. Mr. Freno unfastened the leather lines from his harness and slipped them under the ends of the coffin; and four men lifted and lowered it into the grave. Then they looked at Dr. Dabney and waited. He motioned them to go on. When the mound was rounded and patted down with their spades they took off their hats, looked at Dr. Dabney again,—and waited.

The old minister took a step nearer the grave.

"My friends," he said, "we have come to-day to do the last kind offices for our departed brother. We have consigned his body to the grave, and it remains for me but to deliver to you his dying message."

There was a moment of absolute stillness. Then those on the outskirts pressed a little nearer,—all except a pale young man with a cap pulled over his face, who sat down on a sunken tomb and stretched out his leg as if to rest it. Nobody noticed him, for every eye was bent on Dr. Dabney.

The time for the "warnin'" had come.

"I was with him," he continued, "a few days before his death. He was fully conscious and talked to me freely. He knew his end was near and he was willing to go. I think life had been a hard struggle for him and he was glad to give it up. It is a pitiful thing, brethren,

that this should be so! . . . He had no reproaches for anybody. He said when he told me the story, 'Tell them all I don't blame anybody. They didn't know. If they had known they would have felt differently. I'm sure they would.' And he asked me to tell you to-day the story that he never had a chance to tell."

They listened breathlessly. At last they would know what Zeb Horn had done!

"Zebadiah Horn," began the minister, "was born in Gasconade County thirty-seven years ago. His father died when he was a boy of sixteen, leaving his mother to his care. They lived together on a farm near Franklin, and made a living by hard work. In course of time he was married. He didn't say much about his wife, but he talked freely about his mother, and I judge that they were more to each other than most mothers and sons. He said, 'I always knew I could count on mother.'

"One day when his child was about a year old he went to town. He had some words on the street, he said, with a man who had traded a horse to him. One thing led to another till their blood was up, and a crowd had gathered around them. Then the man coupled the name of Horn's wife with that of a profligate man of the town, and Zeb struck him down. . . .

"Brethren,—he never rose again!"

The old minister paused, and the men looked at each other. This then was Zeb Horn's crime!

"I do not palliate this man's sin." The minister's tone changed swiftly from that of the narrator to the stern accents of the preacher of righteousness.

"To give life or to take it is the prerogative of Almighty God. 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.' . . . 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.' . . . We cannot escape God's law. This man sinned; but he paid the penalty. Not the blood of his veins, but the blood of his manhood! . . . But I charge you to remember, brethren,

that God looks on the heart—not the result. And I call upon you this day—you who have ever in a moment of passion struck down a fellow-man—to raise, if you can, clean hands to heaven, and say: 'I am guiltless of Zeb Horn's sin.'"

He looked around him fearlessly as if expecting a reply. None came. This was not a long-suffering people. Many a man among them had been wont to boast that with him it was "a word and a blow and the blow came first"; many a man among them thought of the time when he had "laid out his man." But his man had risen again. Zeb's had not. *That was all the difference.*

"To go on"—the voice sank to its usual mild cadence —"he was arrested, tried, convicted of manslaughter, and sentenced to the penitentiary for ten years. He was taken to Jefferson City immediately. He had little to say of his prison life, except that they were kind to him, and that he learned the shoemaker's trade."

The shoemaker and the man across from him exchanged significant glances. It was true, then, as they had supposed.

"He was discharged on three-fourths' time, making his term seven and a half years. During the first year he heard from his wife twice. Then the letters ceased. His mother could not write, and his wife did not. Just before his time expired there came to him a pair of cotton socks, home-knit. They were from his mother; he said he knew the knitting. He took them from under his pillow and showed them to me. He wanted to be buried in them."

"He was," said Mr. Freno, with uncovered head. "We put them on him without knowing anything about it."

Dr. Dabney bowed. Nobody felt it to be an interruption.

"He told me," continued the minister, "something of

how he felt when his term expired. There had been ample opportunity for him to think, and he had planned out his future life. He would go back to his old home —among his old neighbours; they had known of his previous life and they would help him to begin again. He made up his mind, he said, to talk freely to them about it, not to evade the subject at all, and then to live such a life of self-sacrifice and helpfulness to others as would partially atone for his sin. He knew he could never outlive the shame of having been a convict, but he would bear that as a part of his punishment, and by his devotion to his family he would try to make up to them for the loss of son and husband and father all these years.

"Brethren, this is what he hoped to do. Let me tell you how it ended. On the train he met a man from Gasconade who had once lived in Franklin. Horn made himself known to him and asked for news of his family. The man looked at him in amazement. Finally he told him all. His wife had gone off with another man six months after he went to the penitentiary, taking the child with her. They had never been heard of since. The man was the one her name had been coupled with. It was true, after all!

"Zeb said he thought he must have been dazed by what he had heard, for when the man left him he sat there trying to think what he would do now, and he could not seem to think clearly of anything. After a while the conductor came to him and asked him if his ticket hadn't been for Franklin.

"He told him it was and he found he had gone several miles beyond, but the conductor slowed up and let him off. He said he sat down by the track and wondered if it wouldn't have been better for him to have gone on, after all. But he thought of his mother and got up and started across the country to his home.

"Brethren, when he reached the house the windows

were boarded up. He said something told him where he would find her; and he went straight to the graveyard. There, sure enough, was a new-made grave by the side of his father's. He stumbled on to a neighbour's and they told him she had died a few weeks before. The place had passed out of her hands, but she had been allowed to live there.

"He stayed only a few days in Franklin. There was no reason for his remaining there now, and somehow it did not seem possible to talk freely with his neighbours. They gave him no chance to do it. He determined to go away—as far as his small supply of money would carry him,—where nobody knew his past history—and begin again.

"His money carried him only to Saline County, where he got work with a shoemaker. He stayed there nearly a year. One day a man came in to have some work done and Zeb recognized him as a fellow-convict who had served out his term. The next day his employer discharged him. He had nothing against him, he said, but he could not have an ex-convict in his shop.

"He went across the river into Charitan County. He determined not to try shoemaking again, but to go on a farm where he would be more away from everybody. It was in the busy season and he easily got work. He said he liked farm work better than his trade, for it seemed more like his old life, and as the summer passed he began to feel that he was secure. One day, late in the fall, he went to the county fair. A man who had been a guard at the prison pointed him out as an ex-convict—not with any intention of injuring him, probably, but with a fool's inability to hold his tongue. It got around and he was discharged.

"He tramped his way into this county and finally into this neighbourhood. You know his history since he has been here. He has never been able to keep a place and—so far as I can learn—has never had a com-

plaint made against him. I have heard many of you talk about him in the last twenty-four hours, and this is what you make him out: a faithful, capable workman; industrious, honest, reliable in all things; gentle to women and little children; kind to dumb animals; untiring in self-sacrifice for the sick and helpless. In addition, I know him to have been a God-fearing, repentant man.

"It was not much he asked of this community,—only the right to live by honest, hard work, and a little—a very little—human companionship. We denied him both! We saw a struggling soul go down in dumb agony and we did not lift a hand to save him. A friendly greeting, a hearty handshake, a word of neighbourly interest, would have been to this man as cold water in a thirsty land. But we did not give them. He asked us for bread and we gave him a stone.

"I asked him if he was afraid to die. No, he said, he did not believe God would be as hard on him as his fellow-men had been. I think he was right. He said, 'If there had only been somebody that I could have told it would have been different—but there wasn't anybody.' It was the pitiful cry two thousand years old—'I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me; refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.' . . . Oh, brethren, brethren,—may God forgive us!"

The old minister had been speaking in an impassioned tone. He stopped suddenly. Then, there being nothing more to say, he raised his hands in benediction, repeating with gentle emphasis which might have passed for irony but was probably only force of habit:

"And now may the peace of God, that passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen."

Ma'-'Liza had been playing beside the grave, sticking her alder bush into the soft mould and pulling it out

again to find a better place. As she felt the tug of her mother's hand she stuck it in firmly and said—her sweet, childish treble smiting the stillness—"I gived *my* f'owers to Zebbie!"

Mrs. Freno caught her to her breast with a sob, and laid her branch beside it. The act was infectious. As by one impulse the women came and cast their flowers upon the mound, with gentle hands and falling tears. And when the procession moved from the cemetery Zeb Horn's grave was a mass of snowy, fragrant blossoms.

But the man was dead!

As Dr. Dabney moved toward the gate (he had been delayed by one and another coming up to explain shamefacedly his particular attitude toward the dead man) he was not a little surprised to come upon Archer McLain. He had not seen him at the grave and was unaware of his presence. The young man's face was grey and haggard.

"Dr. Dabney," he said in a low tone; "would you mind my riding back with you? There's a matter I—want to talk with you about. Sandy will take my horse home."

"I should be glad to have you ride with me," said the clergyman with his unfailing courtesy, "but—I find myself somewhat shaken by what we have just passed through. I am afraid my judgment might not be at its best about a temporal matter." He supposed mistakenly that it was about the old Bascom place the young man wished to speak. "It seems to me—ah-h—! my boy, it seems to me just now that there's only one subject worth conversing upon, and that is—eternity."

Then, noting the tense look still in the eyes looking into his, he asked quickly, and with great gentleness:

"Is it about your soul's salvation, my son, that you would speak with me?"

"No," said McLain.

"Then I will ask you to defer it till another day, if you will. You will not misunderstand?"

For answer, McLain wrung his hand. As he turned away the set lines about his mouth relaxed. He felt like a man that had had a reprieve.

IX

COLONEL JUDD

"McLAIN, what is the matter with you?"

The physician and his patient sat together on the Dabney porch. It was two weeks or more after Zeb Horn's burial, and in that fortnight Dr. Llewellyn had made a number of visits to The Manse on one pretext or another. Very disconcerting reports had come to him about the young man. While improving in health he had fallen into a state of despondency which was most alarming to one experienced in both physical and mental maladies.

"If only he were not gaining physically it would be less serious," the doctor said to Dr. Dabney, to that gentleman's mystification. "But to be gaining in flesh and strength and then have this mental depression come upon him—it's bad! bad! . . . Does he seem like himself when he comes out of these moody fits?"

"Entirely. He is always the same genial, courteous gentleman he has been from the first,—considerate and thoughtful of every one."

"Hasn't taken a dislike to anybody?"

"No. Not that I know of." Then after a moment of thought, "My sister thinks there is a little disposition on his part to shun Genevieve—hardly perceptible—and still she has perceived it."

"Has Jean?"

"I believe so, though she hasn't spoken of it to me. I do not know that I should say shun exactly either. It is more that he seems to wish to be alone, and does not call for the reading, which for a time he seemed to

enjoy very much. He reads more to himself, though" —desiring to be strictly truthful—"I often notice that he isn't reading when he has a book."

"I see," said the doctor, repressing a smile. He was younger than Dr. Dabney by a good many years. "I think I shall stay over with you a day or two, doctor, and study up this case at closer range. I've come down here to see Pattie Dandridge, and I should have to come back to-morrow anyway."

"How is she?"

"Quite sick. I really shall be glad to be near her for a day or two."

He had the young man under close surveillance during the evening, but he saw no signs of depression. On the contrary, he was the life of the company. But the next afternoon the two happened to be left to themselves. McLain sat in his usual place on the steps and Dr. Llewellyn on the porch a little above him.

Under cover of a newspaper the doctor had been studying the face before him for twenty minutes, and that under the most favourable circumstances, for supposing that he was unobserved the man had relaxed and the mask had dropped from the handsome, mocking face and left the mouth set and the eyes perplexed. Between the brows the two vertical lines drew together in a frown. But at the physician's question the mask slipped into place again and the eyes that looked up at him were as frank as a boy's.

"Nothing. Why? Don't you think I am getting along all right?"

"Your leg is getting along all right—yes."

"Well?" McLain threw out the word defiantly.

"Never try to fool your doctor, my boy! A man can deceive his acquaintances often; his spiritual adviser usually; his wife most of the time; but his doctor—well, he'd better look out for his doctor! . . . I've been studying you for two days, McLain. There is something

on your mind that you ought to get rid of. It's hindering your recovery."

"Don't I seem to be progressing fairly well?"

"Yes. You seem to be, but you are not. Your bones are knitting; that gash on your head is healing beautifully." He touched the place as he spoke with a critical finger. "I flatter myself I did a good job with that—but"—he looked straight into the eyes which did not evade his—"there is something behind that gash that I haven't got at yet. Tell me about it, boy."

McLain shook his head. "Your imagination, doctor."

"The noblest and most useful function of the imagination," declared Dr. Llewellyn, didactically, "is not to create but to discern,—to enter so fully into the life of another as to be able to put one's self in that other's place and see things as he sees them—to feel things as he feels them."

The physician's clear-seeing eyes were so kind, so full of the very sympathy he was defining under another name that the younger man had an almost overpowering impulse to throw himself upon that sympathy and tell him all. The Protestant faith in which he had been reared seemed all at once inadequate. If only he could go to some good man—not necessarily nor preferably a priest—under seal of the confessional and tell him all! He did not care so much about absolution. What he wanted, and wanted desperately, was to lay the burden of a secret upon another—for a day, an hour—until he could get his bearings—could see his way—could straighten his back for the load if he found it must be carried. But, with this thought stinging in his mind, what he said, with a touch of bitterness, was:

"A rare gift—is imagination of that kind!"

"That's the hidden wound giving him a twinge," thought the doctor, and he was not deceived though immeasurably surprised when McLain added carelessly,

"You are all off, doctor. The thing that is troubling me is a business matter. I am thinking of buying the old Bascom place, and I am not quite sure whether I ought to do it."

"The old Bascom place! You!" The doctor began to lose faith in his own diagnosis. This surely was a malady of the mind, after all, not of the soul or the body. "What would you do with the old Bascom place?"

"Farm it."

"Have you ever farmed?"

"Never."

"Do you know anything about farming?"

"Not a thing—except theoretically."

"Well, what has put this notion in your head then?"

McLain reflected a moment before replying. His purpose to buy the farm could hardly be said to be a settled one, but the feeling had been growing within him for weeks that he should like to cast in his lot with such people as these. He had been a wanderer for years; he had begun to take root here, and the thought of tearing up now and having to adjust himself to new surroundings seemed for some reason intolerable to him. Why shouldn't he settle it all by deciding upon farming as an occupation and this neighbourhood as an abiding place? It occurred to him now that he would be glad to have the opinion of a level-headed, practical man like Dr. Llewellyn about it.

"Doctor, I am in earnest about this thing, and I want some advice. I have a serious idea of going into farming. You see, it is this way with me. I have never prepared myself for a profession. I had expected to study law, but"—his voice grew hard—"I was cheated out of that. However, that's a long story and it isn't necessary to go into it. I have travelled a good deal in this country and abroad, but I am tired of that now and ready to settle down. I really was on my way to the growing country of Saskatchewan when that wreck

left me stranded here. They say there are great opportunities up there."

"Saskatchewan? Where is that?"

"In Canada. I suppose I could do better there perhaps, but after all I don't know that I want to expatriate myself. I have been thinking a good deal about it since I've been here, especially lately. I never had thought I should particularly care for a farming life—it had never fallen under my observation—but somehow my ideas have changed since I have been in this community. It seems to me a farmer's life is a very independent one, and I don't see why it should not be made a remunerative one."

"It is fairly so—if one knows how."

"Well,—it isn't one of the occult sciences, is it—known only to the few? I am young. Couldn't I learn?"

"Undoubtedly,—if you have some money to waste on learning and experimenting."

"I have."

"And you are sure of your own determination?"

"I think I am."

"Then I don't see why you should not succeed in this business—for it is a business just as any other is, and one must understand it to be successful in it. You know the common idea among town people is that any fool can farm."

"Well—I've been several kinds of fool in my time," murmured McLain. "Perhaps that might help."

"Why don't you rent until you know whether or not you will like it?"

"They won't rent the Bascom place."

"The Bascom place is not the only farm in this State, nor in this county."

"No-o. But for certain reasons I should prefer to be in this neighbourhood."

"I see," said Dr. Llewellyn, who thought he could

see very clearly. "Well—the Bascom farm is a good one, and the business is not hard to learn, I should say. Of course to a man that has travelled a good deal, as I know you have, the life might seem a little monotonous at first. But—she's worth it!"

McLain laughed. "I haven't got her yet. Maybe I shan't want to buy the Bascom place after all."

After a few minutes of good-natured chaffing back and forth Dr. Llewellyn said seriously, "You wouldn't think of buying without looking the place over, would you?"

"Oh, certainly not."

"I didn't know. You never can tell what these half-baked young farmers are going to do."

"I am expecting you to take me over there to see it," said McLain. "Will you?"

"Yes, I will—and I will do more. I will take you over to see the old Colonel who lives on the place just beyond. He is one of the best farmers around here, though he calls himself a back number, and he knows the Bascom farm as he does his own. Whatever Colonel Judd tells you you may rely upon."

"Thank you. I should have to rely upon somebody's opinion besides my own, certainly." In his mind was running a dismayed undercurrent of . . . "Judd! . . . Judd!——"

What he said was, indifferently, "Who is this Colonel Judd? Have I ever seen him?"

"I imagine not. He doesn't go about much. He is getting old."

"Has he sons?"

"He lost a son a few years ago. The only one——"

He was going to say, "The only one that is any comfort to him," but remembering that the two men might soon become neighbours he thought better of it and let the sentence remain unfinished. "No use going into that," he thought. Now an unfinished sentence is a sin-

ister thing; often a phrase or a clause has all the force of an unequivocal statement. It had in this case.

"How long since his son died?" McLain was sitting up, every muscle tense.

"Five years this summer. But the old Colonel has never got over his death. A fine man Luther Judd was too. He was a loss to this community."

McLain dropped back into his former lounging attitude.

"Yes, I should like very much to go over and see Colonel Judd. Will this afternoon suit you?"

Colonel Judd was a gentleman of the old school, that blanket phrase which means much or little, according to the standards of the user and the opportunities of the listener for having met gentlemen of the old school outside of stories. He still supped his mint julep on the porch in summer and dozed in his chair while a little negro kept off the droning flies with a long brush fashioned from a peacock's tail. At Christmas he always had a great bowl of egg-nog made, ready for any chance guest, as his forefathers in the Old Dominion had done. But the guests never came. His neighbours, though most of them like himself were from Virginia or Virginia once removed, were of a younger generation than the Colonel, and had eschewed this Christmas custom of their fathers, esteeming it one more honoured in the breach than the observance. Besides which they were all busy with their own concerns on Christmas Day and had no time to spend on an old man and his whim that old customs should be kept up.

Only Dr. Dabney could be depended upon to come, and Dr. Dabney, though strictly temperate and with a constitutional loathing for liquor, always after one glance at the full bowl and the eager old face, held out his hand for the proffered glass and sipped the froth, descanting on the skill that compounded the mixture, but protesting

that his poor head would not allow him to do justice to it, and gently turning conversation into other channels, under cover of which, and the Colonel's dimming eyes, the glass could be set down before the danger point was reached. Then when the day wore on and there were no more guests, the bowl would be sent to the kitchen out in the yard, where it never suffered slight, for his man Job had Christmas visitors if the Colonel did not. And when it was gone, the Colonel would draw his long dressing gown around him and sit before the fire, shaking his head sorrowfully as he contrasted the present with a by-gone age.

In truth, Colonel Judd was a very lonely old man. The death of his son Luther, who was unmarried and had always lived with his father, was an irreparable loss to him at his advanced age. There was another son, Calvin,—the one of whom Dr. Llewellyn had started to speak—but he had left home eighteen or twenty years ago and had never been back. He had almost dropped out of the minds of the community. There was an unspoken hope in the old man's heart that when the boy heard of his brother's death and knew that he, the father, would be left alone in the old home he would come back, but if there was such an expectation it was without fulfilment. The months and the years went by and nothing came from the land beyond the mountains. Not even to Dr. Dabney did he ever speak his son's name now.

The minister had gone over one day after Luther's death and found him reading Shakespeare. "A wonderful man, parson," he said, tapping his book as he laid it aside. "A wonderful man! He knew the human heart as well as your man Solomon."

He stepped to the back porch to call for a mint julep, and the doctor turned to the volume laid face downward. It was "King Lear," and a marked passage caught his eye:

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child."

The Colonel was sitting on the porch ruminating when Dr. Llewellyn and McLain drove up that afternoon. His gratification at their visit was touchingly evident, particularly when its object was made known.

"The Bascom place?" he repeated. "Do I know the Bascom place? Why, my dear sir, we laid off our farms together, Major Bascom and I. I know the farm every inch of it as I know my own. We lived side by side all our lives; we brought our wives to our new homes; we reared our children"—there was a break in his voice—"we reared our children together; we set out our orchards the same year and the shade trees you see around us. Ah! those were the days when our blood ran fast and life was worth the living! . . . But times are changed—Major Bascom is gone—and you see in me, Mr. McLain, an old man who has lived out more than his time and is fit only to dwell upon the memories of other days and watch his shadow as it lengthens down the slope."

He said it so mournfully that McLain felt a great pity for him. This was the tragedy of age.

"This is not what Dr. Llewellyn tells me, sir. He assures me that your judgment about this farm will be worth more to me than any man's around here."

"Ah! William knows better than that. It might have been once, but not now. I am a broken old man, Mr. McLain,—a broken, childless old man!"

He turned then to Dr. Llewellyn, his strong features working painfully:

"I have no son, William! . . . No son!"

Dr. Llewellyn moved his head in sorrowful protest but made no reply; and McLain, deeply stirred by the old man's emotion, bent forward and said with greatest gentleness:

"I trust, sir, that when I am your neighbour you

will let me come to you for counsel. You are childless and I am without father or mother."

The Colonel reached out his hand and grasped that of the young man, wringing it in a silent compact, while Dr. Llewellyn nodded approval.

Colonel Judd insisted upon going over to the Bascom place with them, ordering a horse for McLain so that together they could ride over the farm.

"You can't examine a farm, William, from a buggy—any more than you could a patient," he said with good-natured contempt.

"Then since I am so neatly eliminated from this case I think I will take myself along home and leave you two farmers to get along the best you can without me. McLain, you feel equal to riding home, do you?"

"I feel equal to anything," the young man answered, buoyantly, "even to getting along without you. I am out of your clutches now, doctor, and under the tutelage of the Colonel here. . . . Yes, I'll send the horse back by Sandy."

Dr. Llewellyn drove off, much pleased at the turn affairs had taken.

"Two hours' consultation will make them friends," he thought, "and it will be a friendship that will do them both good. . . . I wonder if this *is* the thing that was troubling McLain. . . . It might be. The settling upon a business and a location in life is quite a serious thing. But——"

It was evident that he did not more than half believe it yet.

X

THE OLD BASCOM PLACE

McLAIN rode back to The Manse in high spirits. Things certainly were going his way. He and Colonel Judd had gone over the farm thoroughly and it seemed to him most promising; though he had to acknowledge to himself that his judgment was not worth much. But the Colonel's was, and the Colonel had assured him that it was an excellent farm. "It is neglected, but it is good land," he had said; "and good land is like good blood, my boy,—it will tell in the end."

Listening to him the young man felt his fighting blood rise within him. . . . Was it true that good land and good blood would tell? He felt a consuming desire to test it. To build up the waste places—to restore that which was broken down—surely this was no mean ambition! . . . It would be like the work of creation.

Colonel Judd had been very helpful to him that afternoon. He had listened with respectful attention to McLain's plans, commending sometimes, often criticising, but evincing a keen interest in it all. It was easy to see that the old gentleman found his unexpected rôle of counsellor an agreeable one. Nor was it strange, for McLain's deference and confidence in him was very grateful to one who openly proclaimed himself a "back number." They discussed many things on that ride to the farm and over it and back again, and their liking for each other increased with every hour. It was long since the Colonel had had an afternoon of such unalloyed pleasure.

"I am most happy to have been able to serve you, my

young friend," he said when McLain expressed his thanks at parting. "Call on me again. Call on me as often as you wish. I am glad still to be of use to somebody."

As McLain rode home along the pleasant country road the cordiality of these parting words stayed by him like a warm afterglow. "They are a kindly people," he said to himself, "a simple-hearted, friendly people that it would be good to live among. And why not?"

He found his desires and intentions, which had only this morning been in a fluid state, rapidly crystallizing. . . . "Why not?" he asked himself again and again. It was his money and his life. There was not one soul in all the wide world to question this move; not a person who would care enough to give it a passing thought. . . . Oh, yes, there was Judge Haliday, of course,—but the time was past, he told himself with a bitter smile, when Judge Haliday would again remonstrate with him about the spending of money. But this thing that he was entering upon was far more than the spending of money. It was giving final direction to a life. He had been buffeted by the winds long enough; he was in no mood now for a temporary makeshift. If he bought this place it would mean that his lot would be cast in with these people permanently. He tried to look at it in a dispassionate way. *Was* this a fancy that would pall upon him as Dr. Llewellyn had suggested? Would he grow tired of country life in time and want to go back to——

To what? . . . What was there for him to go back to?

He asked the question in bitterest scorn and forced himself to answer.

He was an only child—his sister having died in infancy. His father was an only child. His mother had had one brother who died unmarried. A man so situated is necessarily destitute of relatives.

Friends? . . . He shook his head. No! None that

he would care to look up. He had moved away from his childhood's home at a time when life-long friendships are made, and had been lost in the ocean of New York's surging humanity. Do people ever make close friendships in a city? Perhaps so, but he never had. There were his college mates—but were they friends? It didn't seem so at this moment. Strange, wasn't it, how many acquaintances a man could have and not one upon whom he could put his finger as a real friend!

There was the city itself; was that worth while? . . . He shrank from it with repugnance. Where in all the world was a solitary man so alone—so utterly alone—as in a great city with its roar and ramp, its jostling and fierce struggle for place? He might obtain a foothold there after years of striving,—but what would it be worth when he got it? . . .

This sheltered cove, away from the mad current where one must sink or swim, suddenly presented itself to him as a haven. Here one could easily gain a place in the world—and a sick, wild longing for that came over him. He had lost his place and he wanted it again—a place among men, where he could have his part in the life around him, even though it were but the simple, homely life of the countryside.—And a home! How long it was since he had had a home! . . . This was what he wanted: a place among men; a home; a few friends—real friends—one did not need many—but his heart glowed as he thought of the hours of delightful companionship he had had in Dr. Dabney's house; of his chance acquaintance with Dr. Llewellyn which had ripened so quickly into comradeship; of the seeds of friendship sown only a few hours ago and germinating so rapidly in this receptive soil. It was all so easy and possible in a rural neighbourhood. But in a city! . . . No, no!

His thoughts turned impatiently from the very brick and mortar. Here one could strike hands with Nature

in an undying compact—but not there! What a sweep those grand old oaks had! Such trees as those on the Bascom place would confer distinction upon any place, however poor the house might be. But the house was not poor; it was only run down like the rest—and good building, like good blood, would tell. Colonel Judd's simile stuck like a burr in his memory.

Already he was planning improvements he could make —in the buildings, the orchard, the fields. Ah, what a zest it would give to life to see the thing grow under his hand! To reconstruct a farm—and a life, he said under his breath—for it would mean that. The two would grow into fruitfulness together. . . . And then when he had proved that he could do it; when he had regained a place in the world; when the home and the life had been made worthy of her—well, no! not that either—no home or life that he could ever offer would really be worthy of her, but when they were such as he would be willing to offer——

He drew a long breath then and his very soul quivered. Was there a home and a woman like her yet in the world for him?

He turned his horse's head then toward John Bascom's.

At the supper table it was discussed at length, Dr. Dabney asking many questions, and Miss Lavinia gently reminiscent as to the rose garden.

"How about the house?" asked Dr. Dabney.

"In wretched condition."

"It was a well-built house," he mused. "And houses are like characters; if there is anything to build on——"

It was Colonel Judd's aphorism in a different garb.

"Mr. McLain, is the smoke tree still there?"

"I didn't notice it, Miss Lavinia. Would I know it?"

"Oh, certainly! Anybody would know a smoke tree. It is probably gone."

"I noticed a very luxuriant rose climbing over the piazza."

"A 'Queen of the Prairie'?"

"I couldn't tell you that, Miss Lavinia. It looked as if it ought to be queen of something. And there was a white one on the other side."

"A 'Baltimore Belle,'" she said, eagerly. "I gave it to Mrs. Bascom myself. But the smoke tree——"

"I'll look up the smoke tree to-morrow. I'm going over to take an inventory. Yes, sir," in reply to a question from his host, "I have come to a definite decision."

He glanced as he spoke from the minister to Jean, and the flush he was longing to see was creeping up.

"'Yo' min', hit's made up'?" she quoted, gaily, to cover her confusion, for nothing is so vexatious to a girl as a tide she cannot control.

"'My min', hit's made up.'"

"Mr. McLain," said the minister, extending his hand as they rose, "I give you most hearty welcome to the neighbourhood. I feel that we are to be congratulated on this acquisition."

"Thank you, doctor!" The red blood rose to the young man's face as he grasped the outstretched hand—rose and spread slowly to the very roots of his hair, and then receded as slowly, leaving the face strangely pale. "I—I trust it may prove so."

"Well, I congratulate Mr. McLain," said Jean. "I suppose people always feel so about their homes, but to me Tinkling Spring is the dearest, sweetest spot in the world, if it *is* sleepy."

"And to me," he said, with a look that started the red tide on its round again, "it is where I was brought to life again!"

On the porch he told them his plans. Mrs. Debo was to go with him as his housekeeper and Sandy as—well, as *factotum*.

"I suppose she will feel that I am calling him names again if I tell her that," he said in a quick aside to Jean.

"She may get as much pleasure out of it as she does from his being a *varlet*."

"Have you arranged it with her?" asked Dr. Dabney.

"Yes, tentatively. She would be glad to do it. She has been buffeted about so long that the thought of a settled home with Sandy attracts her."

"It will be an excellent arrangement."

"I think so. They can occupy the tenant house and live their own independent life while I live mine in the larger house. I can conceive"—he smiled whimsically—"that Mrs. Debo's personality might become a trifle overpowering at close range."

"An excellent plan," reiterated the minister.

"She is devoted to you," Jean said. "And Sandy——"

"Oh, Sandy would run his little legs off for me. I know that. You ought to see how big Sandy feels at the idea of earning wages. He calls it a salary."

"Are you going to pay Sandy wages for permitting you to take care of him?" asked Jean, severely.

"I certainly am going to pay him wages. As *factotum* and *varlet* both he will earn it."

"This does credit to your heart, Mr. McLain," said Dr. Dabney, "but really——"

"Now, doctor," McLain remonstrated, "I don't often have an opportunity to give anybody the unadulterated pleasure it is going to be to Sandy to earn wages. I can't deny myself this. I'm a selfish fellow, and I've set my heart on it."

"You are just a great, big-hearted boy!" said Miss Lavinia, with unusual perspicacity. "That's all you are."

"Don't call a fellow names when he has a broken leg, Miss Lavinia. Even a boy will outgrow that condition if you give him time."

"You never will!"

As they went in to prayers McLain said to Jean in a low tone:

"Will you drive me over to the Bascom place to-morrow? I want a woman's opinion about the house. . . . Oh, come now!" as she hesitated, "if you are going to be my sister you'll have to help me out with this thing!"

Jean laughed and consented.

In the bare, big, old-fashioned sitting-room they stood the next day and looked the situation over.

"It suttinly do look mighty obnoxious, marm," said the old negro caretaker in the picturesque phraseology of his race where it is uncontaminated by the rinsings of "book-larnin'," "but hit's jes' lak dey lef' it, 'scusin' of de furniture."

"It is certainly obnoxious," laughed Jean, looking at the gloomy walls and blackened ceiling; "but," as the man shuffled off, "I can see possibilities in it."

"What are they, in Heaven's name? I don't."

"The case is desperate as it stands—I'll admit that. The paper is atrocious and this graining is monstrous—neither fish, flesh, nor fowl—but these are lovely old chair boards and panelling—and that fireplace with its high mantel—I wouldn't change those; they give distinction to the room."

She closed her eyes and he watched her curiously.

"I can *see* a room—hardwood floor and luxurious rugs—walls covered with one of those soft, big-figured papers of greys and white that look old-timey and are the latest thing—dead white paint, chair-boards and all—and mahogany furniture."

"Like those old pieces you were showing me that were your grandfather's?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes. Old mahogany would just suit this room. It is hard to get though, now. You can find reproductions, of course. And there ought to be bookcases all along these walls. Have you any books?"

"Loads of them."

"Where?"

"Boxed up in New York, awaiting my call."

"That's fine! Nothing furnishes a room like books. A line of bookcases over there would be great, filled with nice, juicy books."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know about the juice. Some of mine are my father's theological books."

"Oh, dreadful! I know these old theological libraries. I'll have to give you some of Mr. Maltby's novels."

"Not much, will you! Well, fortunately my father was a man before he was a minister, and a man of literary tastes. Then I have my accumulation—and my grandfather's. You are not the only person that has had a grandfather!"

"Why are your books packed up?" she asked him, suddenly.

"Well, naturally I couldn't cart three generations of books around the country. They were to be sent to me when I was settled."

She nodded and resumed.

"Then for a touch of colour with all this white and grey, I should have bowls and bowls of yellow daffodils on the low bookshelves, or gorgeous red peonies, or lilacs, or roses—each in its season, you understand. And when they were all gone, even to the chrysanthemums, I should have scarlet geraniums in the windows, and a glorious open fire in this old fireplace, with a giant back-log and plenty of hickory sticks that would send up showers of sparks every time you touched them. Then you would have colour and glory too." She stood again with closed eyes. "I can just see that room!"

"And, by Jove!" he cried with kindling enthusiasm, "so can I! You are a witch!"

Outside they sought diligently for the smoke tree.

"Could this be it?" he asked, pointing to a cherry tree.

She rolled her eyes at him.

"Well! For a farmer!"

"The bark looks smoky"—examining it critically. "I don't believe you would know a smoke tree yourself. Come now! would you?"

"Let's go and see the garden," she evaded.

The flower garden had been laid off after Martha Washington's, which made its desolation all the more striking now. Box is not indigenous to the soil of Missouri, and that which formed the borders for Mrs. Bascom's beds had given its owner much travail of soul. It was now like the broken down walls of Jerusalem, and there had been no Nehemiah to repair the breaches thereof.

"I should dig it up," said Jean, decidedly. "I'd rather have an honest plebeian edge of clove pinks than this broken down aristocracy. A box hedge in Missouri is a sickly sham."

"Up she comes!" he cried. "We'll have no shams in this garden. Now what else?"

They paced up and down the tangled, grass-grown walks, she planning and he, pencil in hand, taking notes.

"I almost think I would plough up the whole thing," she said at last, "and start new—except the lilacs and snowballs and honeysuckles." He was looking at her with a strange look on his face. "Now I've got it laid off. Shall I tell you what to plant?"

"No!" he said, with a smile that she did not understand. "This garden is my venture. I am going to plant in it the things that I want to have grow. And *I'll make them grow!*" He clenched his hand. "You see if I don't!"

There was something in his voice that thrilled her, though they were speaking of nothing more than a garden.

"When you look like that I almost think you will

succeed—even if you don't know a cherry tree from a——"

"Come on!" he cried, buoyantly. "Let's go and look for the smoke tree. By George! I've got to find it or lose out with Miss Lavinia."

XI

AUNT JOSEPHINE APPEARS

THE Bascom place was bought, and to the amazement of the neighbourhood, paid for in cash. This at once established McLain's standing as a man of means. His extensive plans for improving and stocking his farm confirmed this impression. Tinkling Spring, accustomed to a slow-moving gait and great restraint in the matter of improvements, fairly caught its breath at the rapidity with which things moved at "The Oaks," as it was now called.

McLain had done his deliberating in the days of his moody convalescence. Now that the die was cast it was the forceful, resolute man of business that stepped to the front. He was possessed of a feverish anxiety to see the work of reconstruction begun. The old farm became a hive of activities.

"He's carryin' things with a high hand," remarked Ben Tolles. "He's layin' off to put up a ice-house. I says to him one day when I was over there, 'You won't git your money back on the ice-house, Cap,' I says, 'seein' as you ain't got no women folks but Drusilla. Better let her hang the milk and butter down the well,' I says."

"How did he take it?"

"Oh, he took it all right. He says, 'Why, yes, I could do that,' jes' like he hadn't thought of it befo'. But I took notice he went on with the ice-house. Waal, I only hope his pile will hold out."

This voiced the sentiment of Tinkling Spring. It was a problem in a neighbourhood which made its money by

hard work and spent it cautiously how the man was to live until the next year's crop was in. It was discussed freely at Henyon's, the country store.

"Shucks!" said Lige Coyt, with a contemptuous, asthmatic wheeze. "What's croppin' to a man like him? Like as not he'll git tired and give it up befo' next year. He don't know nothin' 'bout farmin'. And he don't know enough to take the word of a man that does. I've give him a right smart of advice, knowin' he was young and unexperienced, but——"

"Didn't he thank you for it, Lige?"

"Yes, he thanked me—he's always polite—but Lord! he ain't took it. No, sir! he's jes' playin' at farmin'. You know, Mr. Freno, a man can't farm—not to say reely farm now—that eats breakfast after sun-up. Why, I'm out ploughin' befo' that, ain't you?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Mr. Freno, "I am—in ploughin' season. This time of the year——"

"It don't make no difference 'bout the time of the year," broke in Lige, "not with a sho'-'nough farmer. Why,"—in love with the picture he was drawing of the contrast between himself and his indolent neighbour,—"in the winter time at my house we eat breakfast by candle light every mornin' and then have time to set around half an hour or mo' waitin' for it to git light enough to hitch up. Yes, sir! Now that's my idee of management. My women folks grumbles a right smart over it, but I tell 'em:

> "'Early to bed and early to rise,
> Is the way to be healthy and wealthy and wise.'"

Mr. Coyt delivered himself of this apothegm with the air of being its author.

"Well, Lige," drawled a young fellow sitting on a nail keg and industriously whittling, "I don't see as you've got any call to be crackin' up that there rule of life to yo'

women folks—seein' as it ain't made you ary one of the three."

There was a burst of profane laughter at Mr. Coyt's expense. In a neighbourhood that knew him this was a thrust that struck home.

"I reckon he don't 'low to do much of the ploughin' himself," put in Mr. Freno, in the interests of peace.

"Sorter gentleman farmer, eh?" sneered Lige, in whose breast the last gibe rankled. "Well—he'll find that sort of farmin' went out here jest after the war—went out mighty sudden, too!"

"It never come in down in yo' section, did it, Lige?" enquired the whittler, innocently.

Mr. Coyt was from the creek district, which suffered no loss from the "Proclamation." The men were sitting around in various attitudes of expectancy.

"No, sir, it didn't! *We*-all had too much sense down on Goose Creek ever to put our money in niggers."

"Aw-w! that was it!" His tormentor nodded slowly and comprehendingly as one who has found the long sought solution to a problem. "I see!"

But while giving respectful attention to Mr. Coyt, he skilfully achieved a slight muscular contraction of his left eyelids in the direction of the group, to which they responded with what could be characterized by no more dignified name than a "snicker."

It certainly was true that the embryo farmer could complain of a lack of neither friendliness nor advice. No sooner was he settled upon the Bascom place than his neighbours began to drop in to welcome him to the neighbourhood, and with each man came his contribution. McLain listened to all with courteous attention—and went his own way.

"Get your fences in order," the Colonel said, tersely. "The house can wait."

McLain smiled. Even the Colonel's advice was superfluous here. Since that swiftly etched picture of a library

in white and grey and mahogany had been visualized to him there had been no thought in his mind of essaying the house now. "If it is ever done," he said to himself, "it will be done at her behest and by her planning, God bless her! . . . Yes, the house and I can wait."

"He's goin' at it right," remarked Mr. Cartwright to John Bascom. "I told him he'd better get the outbuildings in shape before he tackled the dwelling house."

"That's right," commented Mr. Bascom, remembering that it was *his* advice that had settled this, before Mr. Cartwright's was given. "He's a sensible young fellow."

He might have changed his mind had he known what this sensible young fellow was doing one July morning about this time.

Jean had said the night before as they sat together on her father's porch, "Did you know we can see your light from my window? In the room that you occupied, you know."

"Yes, I knew it."

"It's queer about that light. Sometimes it is bright as can be, and sometimes it flickers. I wonder why."

"Evidently the swaying of some tree in between. I have noticed the same thing with your light."

"Why, have you? Don't you wish we could get rid of it?"

He nodded, thinking, "Oho! you look for my light too, do you?"

Running diagonally between the two places, a larger part of it on his farm, was a deeply wooded ravine. He did some sighting from his window the next day when, according to all the canons of a rural neighbourhood, he should have been at work, and the result was that the men were set at tree-felling and trimming. The gleam from her window that night proved the accuracy of his eye.

"What did you do to your light?" she asked a few days later. "It shines brilliantly."

"Cut down a tree."

"A tree? You lawless creature."

"Not at all. It was my tree. I'm going to make a vista—to beautify my grounds." Then with a lightness which only half hid the earnestness back of it:

"I'll never let a mere tree obscure the steadiness of my light for—this house."

It was made so impersonal that she could not appropriate much of this, she reflected afterwards.

They were much together as the summer days went by. The family were all interested in his improvements, and it became the accepted custom for him to go over every evening and report progress. He was making the most of his opportunities now, for August was near, and August meant Aunt Josephine.

"I suppose I shan't see anything of you then," he complained. "I see little enough now; and I don't get any reading at all. People seem to think an invalid throws away his literary tastes with his crutches. I believe I'll go back to mine."

"You might unpack your theological library," she suggested. "Have you had it sent on yet?"

"No. I am waiting until I have 'a line of low bookcases with bowls and bowls and bowls of daffodils' on them."

"Haven't you forgotten that yet?"—with slightly heightened colour. Instead of replying he burst out with:

"Is Aunt Josephine going to spoil everything?"

"She will spoil the rides. Aunt Josephine thinks it is perfectly dreadful for me to go about unchaperoned. Maybe she would go with us."

"I pass! Oh, I forgot that in this godly neighbourhood you never 'pass.' Well, I foresee that I shall have to console myself with the old Colonel."

"What queer intimacies you have," she mused. "Mrs. Debo—Sandy—Zeb Horn—Colonel Judd. I sometimes

wonder what is the basis of attraction in your choice of friends."

He looked at her with an inscrutable smile.

"A sympathy for derelicts."

"Derelicts? What are derelicts?"

He replied with a counter question. "So you think Zeb Horn and I were cronies, do you?"

"Oh, he told father about your going down there. They wondered where the fruit and the wine came from —the neighbours that went in afterwards. But when father told me that, *I* knew."

"Well," he acknowledged, with the peculiar kind of shamefacedness that a man somehow seems to feel at being caught red-handed in a kindness, "I did go down there occasionally. The man was so forlorn. Did you know that I was there when he died?"

"Why, no! I thought Mrs. Debo found him dead."

"She did. I knew she was going over there that day to see him about Sandy, so when it was all over I shut up the house and left him there for her to find." He laughed. "I thought it would give her something to talk about the rest of her life."

"Well, you are the queerest!" she said.

Apparently he did not hear her. He was looking off abstractedly into space. The scene in the cabin was before him. "Yes-s,—I sat by him to the last breath. You see, when I went over that day to take him the wine I found that the end was near, and—well!—that's a long journey to start on alone!"

He spoke with such solemnity that she did not pursue the subject, but a few days afterwards she said, saucily:

"I know now what a 'derelict' is. I looked in the dictionary to see. It is 'an abandoned hulk.' Do you base all your friendships on a sympathy for derelicts?"

"Who is this man McLain?"

Mrs. Alexander's tone was uncompromising. It was

the afternoon following her arrival, and she and Dr. Dabney were enjoying an opportunity for free and unrestricted conversation on the piazza. The truth is, that poor Miss Lavinia had been already routed and had retired to her room, ostensibly to sleep but in reality to relate her troubles to Jean and in this way gain strength for the next attack. As Jean said, there was something about Aunt Josephine that kept the fur flying from August first to September.

Dr. Dabney had a whimsical theory that the "dog-days" had something to do with it. If only Josephine could be persuaded to come for her annual visit in May or June when the atmosphere was less oppressive—but then she never would—so that was the end of that. The minister always laid in a large supply of grace for August, but Mrs. Alexander's aggressiveness made heavy inroads upon it; and for this reason he endeavoured to conserve it by putting a strict curb upon himself. Strange how some persons have power to rouse all that is antagonistic in even a sweet, pacific nature like Dr. Dabney's. He was experiencing this now, for he could discern an attack in her very question. His foot was gently tapping as he replied:

"We are hardly accustomed to designating him in this manner, my dear sister,—but the gentleman to whom you refer is our neighbour and good friend, Mr. Archer McLain."

When Dr. Dabney tapped his foot and called Mrs. Alexander "my dear sister" it was an indication to those who knew him best that the curb was needed—and on.

"Yes, I know his name," said Mrs. Alexander, with some impatience, "but what about the man himself? Who is he? I come back after a few months' absence—you know I was up here in March with Mr. Maltby—I come back, I say, to find an utter stranger—to me—installed upon the most friendly footing imaginable in this

house! And I have never heard one word about it. Who is he? I ask again."

"I beg your pardon. I thought I explained to you last night when I introduced him that he was the young man who had his leg broken in the wreck and was laid up here some months."

"Some months!"

"Why, yes, I think so. Let me see. He left here only a few weeks ago, and the wreck was in April. Yes, I was right in saying months. H-m! time certainly flies!" . . . Mrs. Alexander fanned herself rapidly while he was indulging in this moralizing as to the flight of time. "Genevieve wrote you about the wreck?"

"Of course. But she wrote nothing about this man. Genevieve never writes me the things I want to know! She said a number of the injured were brought here—I think she said women and children—that was the impression I got, at any rate—and that one of the patients had a broken leg and would probably have to stay some time."

"That was correct. He did stay some time."

"But she never told me it was a man—and a young man at that!"

"That probably escaped her mind," explained Dr. Dabney.

"Escaped her mind! *James!* whatever escapes the mind of a young woman of twenty you may be very sure it will not be the fact that a young man a few years older than herself is around! No! Genevieve meant to keep this from me!"

"But why should she wish to keep it from you?"

"Because she knew that I would disapprove of it."

"My *dear* sister!" exclaimed Dr. Dabney, moved to unusual plainness of speech, "this is one case beyond your approval or disapproval. The young man was thrown here by the providence of God; he was chained here by a broken leg; when he was well enough to go,

he went. Now, what could he have done more, and what could we have done less?"

"Well, I suppose it is not the 'providence of God' that brings him back here every evening!" Mrs. Alexander's emphasis was biting. "Oh, I know all about it! I have talked it over thoroughly with Lavinia already. I am not one to put off a plain duty! I saw at once that something must be done. Lavinia acknowledged to me that he was a frequent visitor at the house."

"*Acknowledged?*" protested Dr. Dabney, who was somewhat of a precisian in the use of words. "Now, really, Josephine!"

"Yes, acknowledged. I taxed her with it and she admitted that I was right. I could see how it was last night. No intimate friend of the Charltons could have been more at home in this house than this unknown man appeared to be. And my poor sister's child whom I would shield from every harm—whom I love as my own—in daily contact with him. . . . Oh, yes, I know that Genevieve is dear to you too, but——"

Dr. Dabney lowered his eyes and looked at her over his glasses.

"Naturally," he said, a little drily.

"I am sure of it. I don't want to do you injustice, James. But to come here and find my poor sister's daughter in such peril——"

Dr. Dabney's stored up patience was ebbing away.

"What is the particular danger that you apprehend?"

Mrs. Alexander looked at her brother-in-law with an exasperation bordering on contempt.

"The danger that always accompanies free intercourse between young people of their ages—of matrimonial entanglements. Oh, it isn't worth while for us to mince matters, James. You should have found out long ago all about this man. One never can tell how these things are going to end. They ought always to be stopped be-

fore they are begun! 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.'"

"But, Josephine,"—Dr. Dabney was shocked beyond measure—"Genevieve is but a child! I am sure she has never thought——"

"A child!" Mrs. Alexander fanned herself violently. "She is a year older than my poor sister was when she first met you! You know how that terminated."

Dr. Dabney did not reply. He was thinking of his young wife as compared with his daughter.

"Why, bless my soul!" he said at last. "So she is!"

"Of course she is! If you hadn't had your head in the clouds you would have remembered it long ago. . . . Now,—this is why I ask you: What do you know about this young man?"

The dismayed minister reflected. Very little. Certainly little that would satisfy Mrs. Alexander.

"You can see for yourself, Josephine, that he is a gentleman, and a man of education and refinement."

"Do you know anything of his antecedents?"

"Yes." Dr. Dabney looked relieved. "His father was a clergyman."

"A clergyman? Of the Church?"

"Of the Presbyterian Church."

"Oh!" The monosyllable was not encouraging. "Where is he from?"

"New York, I think, is his birthplace."

"And where has he lived since? There is a quarter of a century between his birth and the present time."

"I really cannot answer that. I have heard him speak of the West. I think he has lived there, perhaps."

"The West is large. What part of it?"

"That I could not tell you."

"Do you know what his business was before he came here?"

"No-o, I really do not." The minister was feeling convicted of considerable ignorance. "He has been quite

a traveller—has been around the world—to Egypt and the Holy Land—and in later years has travelled quite extensively in the West and in Mexico. He talks very entertainingly of his travels."

Mrs. Alexander was perceptibly mollified. People could not go around the world without money. It might be well to look into this. Mr. Maltby might grow tired of waiting on Jean.

"He is a man of means then, you would say?"

"He is considered so here. He paid cash for his place."

"Cash for his place! Well, *really,* James, your standards are very primitive. Now, Mr. Maltby——"

"Josephine!" Dr. Dabney rose suddenly and walked to the end of the porch and back again before he spoke another word. But the one he had spoken was sufficient to quell Mrs. Alexander for the present. He stood before her at last and spoke in a tone full of suppressed passion:

"Never let that man's name be spoken again in connection with my daughter. I have investigated his record. He is a profligate libertine and *roué!* I would rather see Genevieve in her grave than wedded to such a man. *Now let that end it!"*

Mrs. Alexander was a nagger, as Jean had said, and a tireless combatant against a weak foe, but she was no match for a white wrath like this. However, she was aware that the race is not to the swift but to the tireless, and Mr. Maltby was worth two millions if he was worth a cent! She determined if possible to have Jean with her the ensuing winter.

In pursuance of this plan, she said to her brother-in-law a few days after this:

"Genevieve is not getting the kind of social training she ought to have. She should spend more of her time with me. Why, James, the poor child hardly knows how to conduct herself at an 'At home,' or a 'Tea.'"

"I trust," said Dr. Dabney with dignity, "that she may be able to acquit herself with credit in the graver emergencies of life."

This ended it for the time being.

"Your Aunt Josephine," said McLain to Jean one day, "is inclined to investigate me, I perceive."

"My Aunt Josephine," she replied, angrily, "is inclined to meddle with everything in this world that doesn't concern her. What has she been saying to you now?"

She had been saying a good deal to her niece.

"Now, don't get ruffled. Don't you see how calm I am? As near as I can make it out she thinks I am not a suitable person to play with you, and she is trying to make out a case against me—with my own assistance."

"How would she get your assistance?"

"You know she proposed the other day driving over with me to see my new possessions. Well, my outside possessions being in rather an inchoate condition, and my mansion still 'obnoxious' I tried to beg off, but she insisted, and as you know I came over for her yesterday in my new buggy. I knew that would pass muster at any rate. Well,—I soon discovered that what she wanted was not an opportunity to investigate my possessions but their possessor. It was so obvious as to be absolutely funny. I haven't been put through such an exciting examination since my Freshman year when I flunked in Math."

"I hope you didn't flunk yesterday."

"Not I. I was on my mettle. I passed one hundred plus. But I'm afraid I bedivelled your relative a little. The temptation was irresistible. Do you mind?"

"Not one bit. Aunt Josephine makes me simply furious with her inquisitiveness and persistency."

"Say,—do you think it is any harm to slide anybody gently off the track when the track isn't hers and she won't get off any other way?"

She shook her head doubtfully. "I don't know about that. I am a great hand to tell the truth or to refuse outright. That's my way."

"But don't you see if you refuse outright that your very refusal tells what the inquisitive one wants to know? Now I heard a man say once—and he was a good man too and his word was never questioned—that he considered a person to be perfectly justified in telling an untruth in answer to a question which the questioner had no right to ask when a refusal would in effect give the whole thing away."

"I think I should refuse."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't. Imagine my refusing to answer your Aunt Josephine! She asked me five hundred questions. And I told her four hundred and fifty lies! There was a small percentage of the truth. But think of the strain of making the four hundred and fifty consistent! I am afraid I have entangled myself in her web. But it was fun to lead her on. Oh, you'll hear from it!"

She did.

"My dear, the man is a Mormon." Mrs. Alexander announced this triumphantly to her niece the next day.

"A Mormon! Why, Aunt Josephine, how you talk! What ever put such a thing in your head?"

"I questioned him—delicately, of course, and not in a manner to arouse his suspicions."

"What right had you to question him?" asked Jean, hotly.

"I feel it my duty, Genevieve, to learn something about this young man. You are my sister's child, and I want to do what I can—in my humble way—to protect you from——"

"But, Aunt Josephine! I have a father to protect me! Why do you feel——"

"Oh, your father! . . . A good man—an excellent

man—but in delicate matters like this a mole!—a bat!—an eyeless fish!"

Jean shut her lips tight and looked out of the window.

"Well, at any rate, I'm thankful to say nobody ever called him a ferret!" But the sarcasm was lost.

"I am convinced that he is a Mormon—probably one of those dreadful elders they tell about that go around secretly trying to make proselytes. That may have been his object in coming into your midst."

"You think he managed to have the train wrecked and his leg broken to give him an opportunity to do this, do you?"

Mrs. Alexander was impervious.

"My child, he knows all about them! I must say for him that he answered my questions without any of the reserve I had expected from a Mormon."

Jean could well imagine how he had led her on.

"Aunt Josephine, what ever gave you this crazy notion in the first place?"

"His familiarity with it all. Why, he has even read the Book of Mormon. He told me so."

"What if he has? I've read the Koran, but I'm not a Mohammedan."

"And he knows all about the Temple and the Tabernacle and the—the taxing house—and——"

"The taxing house? What's that?"

"Don't ask me! Ask him. He told me the greatest lot of things—about the Lion House—and the Bee House—and the Bear House!"

Jean laughed. She could imagine the rest.

She reproached him the next time she saw him. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself to deceive my dear Aunt Josephine this way!"

"Well, she's so easy!" he pleaded in extenuation. "And it gives her so much pleasure. I want to do my part toward entertaining her, don't I?"

XII

DR. DABNEY INVESTIGATES

THE "dog-days" fretted themselves away. September came at last for The Manse and with it a more bracing atmosphere. Life really seemed livable again to the exhausted household. Mrs. Alexander kept up the warfare to the end. Her last words to Dr. Dabney at the country station were: "James! find out for yourself about that young man before it is too late! He is a Mormon."

As he drove home from the station Dr. Dabney thought uncomfortably of his sister-in-law's warning words. He was very sure she was wrong; she had not advanced a single argument to prove she was right; and the presumption was always against her; and yet——

Perhaps it might be the part of wisdom to put the question directly to Mr. McLain and set the matter forever at rest. The thought of catechizing an habitual visitor at his house—one who had eaten of his salt—was extremely repugnant to him, but his sister-in-law's words, "before it is too late," stayed by him. He switched the horse impatiently. Josephine had the most unpleasant way of putting a disagreeable duty before one! Of course if he had himself felt it to be a duty that would have been a different thing, but certainly if he ever did question Mr. McLain on this point it would be solely to satisfy (and silence) Mrs. Alexander.

Dr. Dabney had spent much of the last month in pondering the situation suggested and weighing the dangers. Suppose Josephine were right, and this should end in an attachment between the two young people.

Would he really wish to put any obstacle in their way? He had asked himself the question many times, and thus far it had never received an affirmative answer. He had not the worldly ambitions for his daughter that Mrs. Alexander had; he would be quite content to have her live and die in the quiet neighbourhood where she was born; and the thought of having her safely settled near him where he could see her often—where his grandchildren could run across the fields to visit him and be back in the home nest at night,—this was an attractive picture to him.

He was one who believed that a woman achieved her highest destiny, her greatest happiness—as the wife of a good man, the mother of his children, and the maker of his home. But it must be a good man—one beyond reproach. None other, he told himself almost with a feeling of relief, could ever gain or hold the love of a woman like Genevieve. Her instinct had warned her against Maltby. He felt that he was somewhat a judge of character—who does not? and if there was anything in the outward appearance he had never seen a cleaner man than the one in question. To Dr. Dabney cleanness of life was an essential in the man that aspired to his daughter's hand. He accepted no code of morals that compromised with impurity in man or woman.

It might be premature to suppose that McLain would ever seek his daughter in marriage, but he told himself in all candour now, his eyes being opened, that it would be a strange thing if two young persons thrown together as they had been and having so much in common, should not respond each to the call of the other. . . . Ah, well! the call must decide it. Nature knew! . . . "That's a call that no one human soul can answer for another," he said aloud.

The minister had got this far when Mrs. Alexander's unpleasant suspicions obtruded themselves upon him again.

"Well, well!" he thought, impatiently. "I will ask him about it and have it over."

It was several weeks before he found a convenient time for doing so, and he did not make an opportunity. The truth is, that whenever he looked into the frank, open face of the young man his fears were allayed. One day, however, McLain came over when Genevieve and Miss Lavinia were both away and the circumstances were so propitious that he could no longer compound with his conscience.

"Mr. McLain," he said during a pause in the conversation, "there is a question I should like to ask you if I may—one that has been suggested to me by——"

McLain smiled. He had been expecting this. "By Mrs. Alexander?"

Dr. Dabney looked surprised.

"Yes. Perhaps you have already an inkling of what the question is?"

"I think I have. Miss Genevieve has——"

"Ah! I suspected as much. Then further explanation will not be necessary, and I will ask you plainly without circumlocution: Are you or are you not—a Mormon?"

"I am not."

"You have never been?"

"Never."

"Have you ever been connected with them in any way?"

For one moment McLain hesitated. But one moment is long enough to flash upon Memory's screen many a significant picture. What he saw upon his was a canyon road, a kindly face, and a sheep wagon.

"I was employed by a Mormon once."

"Oh, I don't mean that. I wish to ask if your family is, or has ever been, in any way connected with this sect?"

"Not in any way whatever."

Then with a frank smile he said, "I am afraid I have brought this on myself, doctor. Mrs. Alexander asked me a good many questions and their drift was so apparent that I couldn't resist the temptation to help her make out a case. It was foolish——"

"Yes, yes,"—there was a twinkle in the doctor's eye—"but—perhaps natural."

Then, remembering that this was only one of Mrs. Alexander's points, though the most important one, he continued:

"You have lived in Salt Lake City?"

"Yes, sir."

"May I ask you, without offence, what your business was while you were there?"

McLain swallowed before answering, which Dr. Dabney did not notice.

"I was employed in a bank."

"Ah, yes. Were you there long?"

"I was in the bank but a short time. I had gone West for my health. There was pulmonary trouble in the family. Not finding conditions in Salt Lake favourable——"

"No. I should say a bank would have been a poor place for you—with tendencies of that nature."

McLain bowed. "Yes, it seemed best for me to go elsewhere; and I went down, by easy stages, into old Mexico. There I recovered my health, but I have been a wanderer ever since."

"I see. I have been greatly interested in those wanderings as you have related them to me. I have never had the advantages of travel myself, but I enjoy hearing other men's experiences. It must be very delightful to go at will into these remote places."

Dr. Dabney was relieved that the last of a disagreeable task was done. "I hope I have given no offence, Mr. McLain, by my seeming curiosity."

"Not at all, doctor. Not at all. I am glad to have

given you all the information you have asked for. . . . Yes, old Mexico is a very interesting country. Have I ever told you of my ascent of Mt. Popocatepetl?"

When Jean and Miss Lavinia came in the two were in the midst of a most thrilling recital, which must of course be repeated, and went over into the supper hour. They would hardly have recognized the brilliant narrator in the man who sat that night in his own room with his head bowed like a bulrush, his windows closed to the "vista," and his heart to all that was pure and good. The powers of darkness were fighting within him. Hours he sat there. Finally he got up and went out into the yard. It was a moonless, rayless night, but it suited his mood. He sat down on the horse-blocks and the struggle went on. This was to be fought out once for all.

What it was no man could have told, for it was a voiceless conflict, until suddenly without warning the man's arms were flung out with the cry of a soul at bay:

"But I've paid! I've paid! . . . Good God! am I never to be through!"

It was a week after this before he went over to The Manse. He had intended it should be two, but there was nothing to do at home and he wanted pitifully to see her.

"Mr. McLain," said Jean as they sat together in the library before the wood fire that the crisp October air made grateful, "haven't you decided yet about the choir? I wish you would join it. We need a tenor desperately."

He looked at her and smiled but shook his head. In his ears were still sounding the rumble of his late conflict. He had thought when he came over that it was settled, but at her words it was suddenly renewed, for it was very lonely at The Oaks, and the choir presented its own peculiar allurements.

"Now tell me," she demanded at last, facing him squarely with the issue after a laboured and lengthy

presentation of the case on her part and some skilful parrying on his, "is there really any good reason why you should not sing in our church choir?"

He was looking away from her, half afraid to do otherwise, for her eyes were very eloquent and her lips most persuasive. . . . Was there any real reason, he was asking himself? It was such an innocent pleasure! It committed him to nothing. Why must he deny himself such a trivial thing as singing in a church choir? His conscience which usually compelled him to keep faith with himself at least, gave him a sharp prick at this, for he well knew it was not denying himself the pleasure of sacred music at which he rebelled, but a greater renunciation. And why should he renounce it? he questioned himself, looking steadily into the fire depths. And the fire did not answer—and did not need to answer. He knew why. "But I've paid! I've paid!" rose passionately that old, old cry, and he suddenly grew so weary of it all that when she asked again, "Now, is there really any reason?" the noise of battle ceased and the light of resolve leaped to his eyes.

"No," he said, looking at her quietly, "there is absolutely no good reason why I should not sing in your choir."

"And you will?"

"I will."

"Oh, I am so glad! We need a tenor dreadfully. But my! aren't you solemn about it! You said that as if you were pronouncing sentence of death."

"Did you think so? It sounded more to me like a verdict of acquittal. Well, now! I believe you said if I joined your choir I might always take you to choir practice?"

"I *didn't!* You know I didn't!"

"But you will? Now tell me," he said, mockingly, using her very tone and trick of intonation, even to the wealth of emphasis and the dropping of the "r's," "is

there *really* any *good* reason why I shouldn't always take you to the meetings of our chu'ch choiah?"

She looked with ostentatious perplexity out of the window, down at her foot, up at the ceiling, and finally into the fire, shaking her head gravely as he had done—he recognized himself in the exaggeration—then turning toward him replied in a tone of melodrama, "No! there is absolutely no—good—reason why you should not always take me to our chu'ch choiah!"

"And may I?"

"You may."

Her mocking lips were perilously close to him. An insane impulse came over him to catch her in his arms; but he caught desperately at his self-control instead, and felicitated himself upon the obvious fact that it was gaining in strength.

If McLain ever had any stirrings of conscience afterwards about having aligned himself with the religious life of Tinkling Spring they were simply twinges and passed as quickly as they came. The thing was settled now. He gave himself up unreservedly to the pleasure of being with her, of mingling his voice with hers, of singing from the same book—his hand side by side with the shapely one rising from her dimpled wrist, whose curves sometimes held his gaze when it should have been concentrated on the sacred words.

And then when the hour of singing was over there was the keener enjoyment, the unalloyed happiness, of those long winter rides with Jean tucked snugly beside him in his new buggy behind his spanking bays, her bright face smiling up into his, her voice speaking sparkling nothings in his ear. She had the sweetest voice, with its indescribable soft Southern drawl and its elisions,—and the merriest laugh that ever woke the echoes of a quiet country road. He sometimes walked his horses when he might well have gone faster, just to prolong the subtle bliss of it all.

Sometimes when the highway was just right for it—which it must be admitted was not often—and the spirit of daring was on them he would let out the bays when they reached the long, level stretch after they passed the hill and they would skim over the hard, packed road at breakneck speed—breathless and voiceless with the exhilaration of this swift-winged flight through space together.

Ah! how blind are they who in these days of myopic vision when luxury is fondly imagined to be life, and all the world is mad to be *honk-honking*—how blind, I say, are they who set bounds upon the opportunities of youth and arrogantly assume that within the charmed circumference of the tonneau with its irresistible sweep, is joy,—and that outside of it is vapidness! Such students have not gone very deep in the interesting study of the teens and twenties. For in the teens and twenties is the Golden Age of Youth—and Youth is Love—and Love is Life—and Life, with youth and love, either plus or minus the tonneau—is Joy!

A hundred times during that fall and early winter was he tempted to speak the words that would seal his fate; but something always held him back. "Not yet!" he would think, "not yet! Let me prove myself to them first." Perhaps it was this; perhaps the haunting fear that the word spoken prematurely might end all. His was the self-distrust of the true lover, for Jean Dabney was not a girl to wear her heart on her sleeve, and there was always the fear of Tom Alexander.

It was from one of these rides they had come in one sparkling January night when there was a frosty tang about the air that went to the head like wine. It had brought a sparkle to Jean's eyes and a dash of red to her cheek, and when not knowing there were guests in the house they stepped gaily into the hall and she stood under the hanging lamp, laughing and shaking snow from her red-brown hair, the visitor, who was facing the open

door into the hall, thought he had rarely seen so fair a vision. The two were in gay humour, laughing and talking when they came in, but observing that Dr. Dabney had company they were subduing themselves and meditating retreat when the doctor called:

"Genevieve!"

"In a minute, father,"—divesting herself of her wraps and signalling "Too late!" to her companion, who frowned ruefully, remembering that the ride might have been prolonged over a perfect road. She advanced into the room to meet a middle-aged man—a rather pleasant looking one—whom she had never seen, but who had risen and stood awaiting her with evident anticipation.

"Genevieve, this is an old friend who used to know you years ago,—Mr. Judd. You would hardly know her, would you, Calvin?"

Mr. Judd had not fully delivered himself of the gallant and somewhat lengthy speech invited by this presentation to a young lady who at their last meeting had sat upon his knee when McLain entered from the door immediately facing him. The stranger glanced up casually—and the words on his lips trailed off into nothingness.

XIII

CALVIN JUDD

"AH! come in, come in, my boy! . . . Mr. Judd, let me introduce to you our young friend and neighbour—Mr. McLain."

The two men shook hands cordially.

"I am not sure that I quite understood the name?" apologized Mr. Judd, interrogatively.

"McLain," the young man said with distinct enunciation, meeting the stranger's eye pleasantly and steadily.

Mr. Judd gave the hand he held a renewed grasp. "Ah, Mr.—McLain, I am very glad to meet you, sir,—though your coming did interrupt some interesting reminiscences with this young lady,"—Calvin Judd was from the West and had the breezy Western cordiality—"very glad *indeed* to meet you!"

They sat down about the open fire, McLain courteously placing a chair for Jean in front of it, and he himself passing to one a little in the shadow, and they fell into easy conversation.

"Mr. Judd is from the West, Mr. McLain," explained Dr. Dabney, with the amiable intention of making conversation general. "Salt Lake, I believe you said, Calvin?"

"Yes, doctor—the 'City of the Saints.' Have you ever happened to be in our town, Mr. McLain?"

"I was once—for a short time," the young man replied, briefly.

"Rather an attractive place, don't you think?" pursued Mr. Judd.

"I cannot say that it attracted me as much as some places I have seen."

"Ah?" Mr. Judd appeared surprised but not offended, though Miss Lavinia thought Mr. McLain's frankness rather brusque,—"you may not have seen it under the most favourable circumstances. You must give us another chance, Mr.—McLain, when you can stay longer."

There was something in his tone that convinced Jean he was not altogether pleased with McLain's estimate of his adopted city, and perhaps the doctor had the same idea, for he went on hastily:

"Don't let that story get away from you, Calvin." Then to the young people, "Mr. Judd has been entertaining us with some reminiscences of his official life. Perhaps, Calvin, we should explain to Mr. McLain that you are Sheriff of Salt Lake County."

McLain bowed. Mr. Judd opened his lips to speak, but apparently thought better of it and turned to Jean.

"I don't know that I ought to tell that story, Miss Genevieve. It is not very complimentary to your sex."

"Go on, Mr. Judd," she laughed. "You will never find me deserting the ranks, no matter how you malign us."

"You will understand that in my strictures on feminine human nature I recognize the fact that it is the softness of a woman's heart that is at the bottom of the—well, if you will pardon me—the softness of her cranium in these matters. And then—'present company,' you know——"

"Yes, I know. We'll excuse you. Give us the story."

"The truth is," he said, turning to McLain, "I was expressing myself rather warmly about the mawkish sentimental sympathy which women feel for criminals, and some of the foolish things it leads them into. And to substantiate my position I was relating an occurrence I had known of in Salt Lake some years ago. A man was

thrown into jail there for an offence which to hard-hearted men seemed sufficient to warrant his languishing in confinement for a short space. Men are pretty hard-hearted, you know, compared with women. Well, while he was there a lot of women came to read to the prisoners and sing hymns to 'em, and this chap being pretty good-looking caught their eye, and when they talked with him he was soft-spoken and sorrowful looking—and all that goes a long way with women, doctor,—and they immediately jumped at the conclusion, without enquiry into his offence, that prison fare wasn't good enough for a handsome man like him, and they told it around among the other women, and before long it kept that fellow working overtime to eat all the dainties that piled in on him! Yes, sir! the jailer said it was fairly sickening to see good women making such fools of themselves—saving your presence, ladies!"

"Don't apologize," said Jean, "I should feel just as the jailer did."

Mr. Judd gave a quick, short laugh.

"Well, about this time, when his digestion could hardly keep up with the supply, and the women were falling over themselves to see whose pie would get there first, a case of another kind came up that attracted considerable attention and even got into the newspapers. An officer found some starving children in a hovel of a tenement one bitter cold day without an atom of fire, and the three little ones huddled in the bed to keep them from freezing. There was nothing—absolutely nothing—in the house to eat, and the mother had gone out to try to find work, or if she couldn't do that, to beg food to keep her children alive. Well, between the cold and the lack of food those babies were pretty near all in, and it made a pitiful story when it got into the papers, and the women saw to it that those children had something to eat, I can tell you, for their *hearts* are 'most always right, God bless 'em!

"Well! Didn't they go for the brute of a man that

had deserted them! and nobody harder on him than the good sisters of the cake and pie. Then upon investigation what did it turn out but that the 'brute of a man' was the identical chap they had been feeding on the fat of the land! Yes, sir! . . . They were mightily ashamed of it then, and the Chief of Police read them a lecture on philanthropy that ought to have done them some good.

"'When you find yourself running over with sympathy,' he told them, 'you spend it on women and children—and cripples—not on able-bodied men in jail for something you don't know anything about.' There's a lot of misplaced sympathy in the world, Mr. McLain," he ended. "If a man has done wrong he ought to suffer for it, don't you think so?"

"Undoubtedly. It is only a question of the justice of the punishment,—and when he has had enough."

He spoke impartially, but there was that in his eyes from which the other man turned away with a qualm of the very weakness he had ascribed to the other sex. When Mr. Judd spoke again it was to his host about neighbourhood happenings and the changes during his long absence.

In this conversation McLain, being a stranger, naturally took no part; but Dr. Dabney had known Calvin Judd many, many years ago and was finding keenest enjoyment in the revival of those old days; and her father's friends being always Jean's friends, as well, she too was feeling a pleasure only second to his in all the reminiscent flood in which they were soon enveloped.

"And so this young lady who used to flirt with me eighteen years ago at the tender age of two or three is now leader of the choir in the old church, and I am pushed aside by another generation of young fellows," Mr. Judd said in playful banter to Jean, who laughingly admitted one allegation while denying the other. "Well, well! Time brings its changes, doctor—time brings its

changes! Do I understand that you also sing in the choir, Mr.—McLain?"

He turned to the young man with an agreeable smile seen of all and a gleam of amusement in his eyes which was perceptible to but one.

"I do," replied McLain, as succinctly as if he were on the witness stand. There was a curtness about his brief reply that surprised Jean, and she hastened to supplement it with the remark that when they found Mr. McLain possessed of an unusually good tenor voice they had persuaded him to bring it to the assistance of the church.

"I see. I see. And doubtless Mr. McLain was easily persuaded. I know how forcible such arguments are."

"Indeed, he was not easily persuaded. He held off like some young girl waiting to be urged to a performance on the piano."

Mr. Judd turned from her to the young man across the hearth.

"Couldn't quite make up your mind to it at first, eh?"

"Not immediately. The urging was rather pleasant, you see."

"I see. . . . Well, doctor, isn't a quartette choir an innovation in the old church? When I sat under your ministrations we used to sing from the old 'Psalmodist' and 'Jubilee' to a pitch given us by a tuning fork. I can hear that resonant 'buzz-z!' now, though I haven't thought of a tuning fork for a quarter of a century nearly."

"Yes, we've changed with the times, I suppose. We haven't got to a fiddle and a bass viol yet, as I hear they have in some of the churches, but——"

"You'll get there!" encouraged Mr. Judd, with a cheerful optimism. "Things move rapidly in this world —I've been observing it since I've been back. Why, don't I remember my father's telling how in his time one

of the elders said, 'He would rather see the devil thrust his right arm into this church than see an organ there?' But you've got the organ."

"I remember it!" cried Miss Lavinia, who had taken small part in the conversation up to this time. "That was when you were in Princeton, brother. We had a little melodeon that we used in Sunday School, and Mollie Bell played it, and Jimmie Cox pumped, because Mollie was a piano player and couldn't keep her fingers and feet going at the same time—at least that was what she said was the reason—and a lot of us sat around the melodeon and did the singing. And we made up a plan one day that we would have the melodeon that night at church—you see they never would let us have it in church, but only in Sunday School, for somehow they thought it was wicked to have an instrument for public worship—I don't know why when we had it in Sunday School, but——"

"They reasoned, probably, that the plastic mind of the child was incapable of receiving impressions," said Mr. Judd, "but that adults should be protected. How is that, doctor, for an explanation?"

"Very logical, Calvin. Evidently your education in dialectics has not been neglected."

"Well, I suppose that must have been it," pursued Miss Lavinia, drawn out of herself by this rush of memories and a little intolerant of interruptions, "for they would not let us have it in church. We stayed after Sunday School, a lot of us young folks, and planned that we would have the melodeon that night or die in the attempt." Miss Lavinia's faded cheek flushed at the bare recalling of that dash for liberty, and Jean, turning to McLain, touched her own cheek and called him to notice Miss Lavinia's. He smiled back at her with swift understanding.

"And how did it turn out, Miss Lavinia?" he asked.

"Well, when time for the evening service came we all

got there early and selected our tunes, and then when the first hymn was given out we looked at each other and Jimmie Cox got the melodeon well pumped up and Mollie Bell put her foot down on the loud pedal and held it there, and we looked straight ahead of us and let out our voices—and how we sang! At the first sound of the melodeon Dr. Davis turned around in his seat and glared at us, and everybody thought he was going to get up and leave the church—he was so angry—but he didn't, and we sang every hymn just that way, and *my!* but didn't we enjoy it!"

"Why, auntie! I am surprised that you should have done so wicked a thing!"

"It wasn't right, my dear. I should never advise you to do so, but——"

"And you've had the organ ever since?" asked McLain. "That was the final victory?"

"Oh, *dear* no! We never had it after that night. It was the very next day in the meeting of the session that Dr. Davis made the speech that Calvin speaks of. And my mother said when she heard of it that the devil wasn't far off when a ruling elder could make such a speech. No, we never had an organ until Dr. Davis's daughters were grown up and wanted one. Then he gave in."

"That's the way they educate us, Calvin," said the minister.

This led to talk about changing times, and when there was a moment's lull Mr. Judd turned directly to the young man opposite.

"Mr. McLain, I have been wondering if you can be the young man my father has been telling me about who is living on the old Bascom place."

"Probably. I bought the Bascom place some months ago."

"Ah? Then you are expecting to become a permanent resident of this neighbourhood?"

"I expect to—yes," McLain answered with deliberation. "That is, if I am successful in what I am trying to accomplish. I don't know very much about farming. Your father has been giving me some lessons."

"So he tells me. He thinks you are an apt pupil; says you are going at it in the right way—which I suppose means following his advice—that's generally the right way. Well, my father is a pretty good farmer. He ought to be able to tell you a few things. Isn't that so, doctor?"

"None better in the community," responded the doctor, heartily. "Mr. McLain is doing well to take the advice of one good farmer who is willing to give it when asked rather than the proffered instructions of a dozen who volunteer it."

"I think my father has really enjoyed having Mr. McLain come to him." He looked at the immobile features of the man opposite, and his lips twitched. "You've captured him, all right!"

"Mr. McLain has a way of capturing us old fellows," remarked Dr. Dabney, giving him an affectionate glance.

"That's very kind, doctor," said the young man, a flush rising to his face which for some reason seemed pale to-night.

"Yes," Mr. Judd remarked after a moment, "farming is a nice, clean business—not quite so exciting as dabbling in mining stocks, which is what we do out in our country, but safer. I congratulate you, Mr. McLain, that you have made so prosperous a beginning in this community, which as my old home I am glad to see attracting new blood and—good citizens, like yourself. Even in this short time—I believe you said you had been here less than a year—you seem to have established a snug little nest here. The Bascom farm is a good one, and with *my* father as your tutor,"—with a short laugh which Dr. Dabney thought just a trifle disrespectful to

Colonel Judd—"your church affiliations, and-d—congenial friends"—he waved his hand in an expansive way that seemed to include present company and the whole countryside—"you certainly are fortunate, Mr. McLain."

The young man whose prospects, present and future, were thus pleasantly though somewhat embarrassingly held up to view, made some polite acknowledgment to the effect that he had always considered himself so, and nobody but the urbane Mr. Judd observed the convulsive closing of his right hand which hung on the side next to the mantel.

"Speaking of mining, doctor,—do you know that with the mining industry comes one of the curses of our Western country?"

"How so? I thought mining was one of your richest resources."

"And so it is. It isn't mining itself that I am referring to. I am too good a Westerner for that. But it is what goes with it—gambling in mining stocks. It offers such a temptation to men to speculate. It is an insidious thing! It gets into the blood like a passion for any other kind of gambling. There is a temptation to a man to put his small savings in in the hope of getting rich quick, and all that is very demoralizing to business. I've been through the mill and I know! Perhaps you observed the prevalence of this evil, Mr. McLain, while you were in Salt Lake?"

"I was in Utah but a short time," said McLain, with composure.

"Yes, I remember. Well, naturally you wouldn't know much about it—just passing through, as you did—and perhaps somewhat hurriedly as so many do." The young man was looking at him steadily with slightly narrowed eyes. "Well, as I say, there is a feverish, unnatural excitement about the thing that is very detrimental to a healthy business life."

"Still, it seems that the mining industry should be a legitimate one," said Dr. Dabney. "The silver and the gold are put there by the Creator—for our use——"

"But it is not getting the silver and the gold from the place the Creator put it that I'm talking about. Oh, no! That isn't it! It's getting the silver and the gold —and the greenbacks too—from where the Creator didn't put them."

"How could that be done, Calvin? It sounds paradoxical."

"Not at all. There are so many good mines in Utah, and so many fortunes have been made out of them, legitimately, that there is always the desire to exploit a new one in the hope that it may prove a bonanza. Sometimes it is. But generally it isn't.

"You see, they have only to find a promising prospect hole, begin work on it, organize a company, give it a name, get it listed if possible (they are more careful about that now than they used to be), put the stock on the market, and sit back and wait for us to bite. *And we bite!* You know they say there's a sucker born every minute! . . . Do people buy stocks like that? Why, of course they do! Crazy to get in on the 'ground floor.' Sometimes they get in below the ground floor. You buy in expecting this flourishing institution to turn out a mine and you wake up some fine morning to discover that it is—and ever will be—a hole in the ground, and you are in it!"

Miss Lavinia had been trying to follow the intricacies of the mining business as expounded by Mr. Judd and had laid aside her crocheting to give her whole mind to it. It seemed necessary now to drop in a question.

"In what, Calvin? In the mine?"

"No, madam—in the hole."

The two men, one of whom knew so little about mining operations, looked at each other and laughed, and the doctor and Jean joined in. As for Miss Lavinia, she

resumed her crocheting and gave her mind to settling whether she would have waffles or Sally Lunn for breakfast if Calvin stayed all night.

"I never have quite understood how stocks can be forced up or down at will," said Dr. Dabney. "Of course I have not studied the subject, but I wonder about it as you speak of it."

"I think I can illustrate that to you, doctor, by a story I heard the other day. It is not a Utah story, but it will illustrate the boosting of mining stocks anywhere. In the early days of California there was a man living in San Francisco by the name of Hascall. He had made a lot of money in the mining business and owned the controlling stock in a string of mines,—some of which were shipping ore—the others shipping literature. Hascall stood pretty well with the mining men around San Francisco, for while he was known as a daring speculator and a keen trader he never broke his word in money matters.

"Well, one day a Jew whom he knew but slightly came into his office. Hascall knew him as one of a crowd of Jews who had been plunging rather heavily in mining stocks, and he had no great liking for the clique. The Jew got right down to business. He told Hascall that he had been losing heavily during the past year and was at his wits' end to know how to recoup. He had come, he said, to see if Hascall couldn't put him on to something good, so that he would stand a fair chance of getting back what he had lost. Hascall told him he thought it was a pretty nervy proposition for him to come to *him* to get a tip—that he wasn't in the habit of giving tips anyway—especially to one who could not even be classed as a friend. The Jew admitted he was asking a good deal, but said he had come as a last resort and pleaded to be let in on something good. Hascall demurred, telling him plainly that if he should give him a tip it would be all over town by the next day and would spoil any

chance for stock manipulation that might be attempted. But the Jew swore he would hold as strictly confidential any information that Hascall would give him.

"The outcome of it all was that Hascall relented. There was one stock on the market, he told him, that was certain to rise within a few days, and he might let him in on that if he would promise on his word of honour not to breathe it to a living soul. How much did he want to risk? He didn't want to risk anything, the Jew said, warily, but he could get hold of $30,000 if he was sure he wouldn't lose on it.

"'Well,' says Hascall, 'you know what mining deals are—they are always more or less uncertain—but I know that this stock is going to rise inside of two days. In fact, I am so sure of it that I will agree to stand good for any losses you may incur on this advice—provided *you don't spoil the game by selling before it's time.* You'll have to agree to that or it's all off.'

"The Jew agreed, and then Hascall told him. The stock was South Central.—*Get all he could.* Now, Hascall owned a controlling interest in South Central. See?" He nodded at McLain, who smiled.

"I see."

"I don't," said Jean.

"You don't have to, young lady. You're a woman. A few days afterwards the Jew came to Hascall in great excitement. He had bought the stock and it had advanced so that he could now sell at a good profit. 'Not yet,' Hascall told him. The next day South Central took a jump, and again the Jew came around for instructions. 'No,' says Hascall, 'not yet. Hold on two days longer.' Sure enough the following day the stock took another jump, and a large amount changed hands, a good part of which was Hascall's stock.

"On the afternoon of the second day the Jew rushed into Hascall's office, the picture of despair. The slump had come! The stock had been hammered down to

one-half what it was when the Jew bought in. He was wild.

"'I'm ruined,' he cried, 'absolutely ruined! Why in'—well, we'll say 'the world,' though that wasn't just what the Jew said—'didn't you let me sell when I wanted to?'

"'A man's judgment can't be infallible,' says Hascall. 'How much did you lose?'

"'Thirty thousand dollars,' screamed the Jew.

"'Well,' says Hascall, 'it's unfortunate. But no man can say I'm not as good as my word.' He was writing out a check. 'Here's your money, Mr. Goldstein.' And the Jew took it, mighty glad to come out even."

"But how could he afford to do that?" asked the minister, who was a little bewildered at the rapidity of this rise and fall.

Mr. Judd chuckled.

"Oh, he could afford it all right. He had cleaned up a hundred and fifty thousand dollars on that transaction, after giving his check for thirty thousand to cover the Jew's loss!"

His audience gasped.

"And the funniest thing about it was that Hascall never had any idea of boosting South Central until the Jew came to him for a tip. But he knew that if he gave Goldstein a confidential tip he would go straight to his friends and let them in on it. He saw a good chance to boom a stock of very uncertain value and to get even with a crowd of Jews who were trying to do him. He did it all right, for that crowd lost about three hundred thousand dollars of good money on that deal. You see, doctor,"—for Dr. Dabney looked as if he were still waiting for the point—"he boosted the stock by that very simple ruse, and the Jews fell over themselves trying to get it. Well, they did get it, for Hascall's brokers had instructions to sell. When the end came they had the stock (and the experience) and Hascall had the money—

one hundred and fifty thousand net! . . . No, sir, the Jews didn't have any hard feelings toward Hascall. On the contrary, the thirty thousand dollar check he gave Goldstein simply added to his reputation as a man of his word, while the crowd was lost in admiration of a fellow that could turn a trick like that."

"I suppose," said McLain, in an even voice, "that was looked upon as a perfectly legitimate transaction?"

"I never heard that he lost standing by it. It's a queer world, Mr. McLain."

"I've sometimes thought so," McLain answered, drily. Then, glancing at the clock, he rose. "I am sorry to break up this party, but I have quite a drive before me."

Calvin Judd rose also.

"I will ride with you, Mr. McLain, if you don't mind. I walked over."

"With pleasure," said McLain, moistening dry lips. His voice was unnatural in a hoarseness that had come upon him. Genevieve Dabney looked up at him wonderingly. As the lamplight fell on him he looked white and haggard.

They both said good-night to Miss Lavinia in the room, and when the others had gone to the door McLain raised her wrinkled, blue-veined hand to his lips. She smiled up at him, evidently pleased. "A pretty, old-fashioned custom, Mr. McLain. I am sorry to see it pass."

Before he reached the door he met Dr. Dabney coming back in a shiver.

"Good-night, my boy! good-night. . . . Genevieve, don't leave that door open."

Jean stepped out into the vestibule with McLain and closed it softly behind her. Calvin Judd was unfastening the horses. The young man stood a moment in silence beside the girl, too filled with the pregnant magnitude of the moment for speech. Then, overpowered by some uncontrollable emotion, he caught her hand in both of his and pressed it to his heart.

"Jean!" he cried, hoarsely, "Jean! *oh, Jean!* . . . *Good-bye!*"

The two men had driven out of sight of the house before either spoke.

"Well?" said McLain, doggedly, at last.

"Oh, I knew you, of course," returned Mr. Judd.

XIV

McLAIN PLEADS

THE silence was broken again by McLain.

"How did you find me?"

"My dear boy, I didn't find you. You found me. I give you my word of honour I did not know you were within a thousand miles of this place until you walked in on me two hours ago." He grinned into the astounded face of his companion, and gathered up the lines which had fallen from his unnerved hands, restoring them to him with a polite bow.

"No, Mr. McLain,—if I am justified in calling you by that name——"

"You are entirely justified," the young man said curtly. "It was my father's name, and is the one that I am entitled to."

"But surely my memory doesn't play me false when it tells me that you used to be called Branham? And that it was as Branham you were——"

"Branham was my stepfather's name and I was always known by it. I have used my own—the one that belongs to me—since I have been here."

"O-ho! that's it, is it? Well, now, I don't blame you!" There was open derision in his tone. "A man naturally wants to bear his father's name at some time in his life, and this certainly was a convenient season for a change. Well, as I was saying, Mr. McLain, this meeting only goes to prove the reliability of the old adage, which nobody who has seen life as sheriff in the West would ever deny—that truth is stranger than fiction. And it goes to illustrate also how insignificant a

switch can sometimes turn a loaded freight train of events from us or toward us.

"Do you know it is an actual fact that had you prolonged your ride last night two hours, or said good-night to Jean Dabney at her father's door without coming in, I should have gone back to Utah to-morrow without a ghost of an idea that you were in my vicinity?" McLain clenched his hand. "I am here on a hurried visit to my old father whom I have not seen for nearly twenty years—more's the shame to me!—and that is my sole business. I have heard him tell about the young man who had taken the Bascom place and how friendly he was—and I will say right here, McLain, that I appreciate your attentions to him,—for I haven't done my duty by the old gentleman——"

"Don't mention it," said McLain, drily. "It is quite possible that my 'attentions,' as you are pleased to call them, might have been less marked had I known he was your father. At any rate I have received more than I have given. Go on with what you were saying."

"I was saying that I had heard my father speak of you in the highest terms, and that to-night before you appeared on the scene Dr. Dabney had told me of the young man cast at his door by a wreck, and had given you a most excellent character; and I had congratulated them both upon this acquisition to the neighbourhood—for who the devil would have expected to find in Archer McLain, prosperous, reputable farmer of Tinkling Spring—*John Branham,* the—well, we won't call names!"

McLain drew a quick, hard breath and shut his teeth. . . . To have had a chance like that—and then have lost it! But—there was no use dwelling on it now. The switch had turned his way and the load was upon him.

"Well,—what are you going to do?" he demanded,

roughly. "Give it to me! Don't keep me over the fire as you did to-night!"

Mr. Judd laughed.

"Oh! you recognized it as a roast, did you. I flatter myself that was pretty well done. In fact, my side remarks to you were so delicately worded, as you may say, and you made so little sign, that I began to fear my arrows might have gone over your head as they did over the old doctor's. You carried it off well, McLain—I'll say that much for you. There was just one little clutch of your hand that betrayed you. Then I knew that you were not invulnerable."

"Experiences like mine are not conducive to thick skins," said the man, with bitter irony. "It was diabolical!"

Mr. Judd appeared inclined to pursue the same line of diabolism further, for he was obviously disinclined to answer McLain's question in any direct fashion.

"Say! that mining story fell flat, didn't it? Nobody knew enough about the subject to follow me except you, and I didn't feel that I had your undivided attention. I'll bet you ten dollars right now the old doctor thinks Hascall was out thirty thousand dollars on that deal."

"Oh, don't sit there talking to me about your mining stories!" cried McLain, savagely. "Tell me what you are going to do!"

"What do you think I ought to do?"

"Oh, of course I can see your side, Judd," he said, slowly. "Theoretically—a man in your position must do his sworn duty—I suppose. As sheriff of Salt Lake County——"

"Well, if I were sheriff of Salt Lake County," remarked Mr. Judd, dispassionately, but with an emphasis that left no doubt as to his sincerity, "you would know what I was going to do pretty damned quick, I can tell you! But what makes you think I have any sworn duty at the present time?"

Mr. Judd left his victim dangling at the point of another question.

"Speak out plainly and tell me what you mean," demanded McLain, his face whitening to the very lips.

"I mean that I am no more sheriff of Salt Lake County than you are. I am now plain Calvin Judd, Esq.—citizen of Utah—relegated to private life."

"But you told me——"

"No, I didn't. It was Dr. Dabney that told you. He said I *was* sheriff when he should have said I *had been*. He misunderstood me, that's all; and I didn't correct it, for I wanted to keep you over the fire a while. . . . No, sir! I'm no sheriff. A private citizen—that's what I am. Sad, but true! . . . You see, it is quite a while since 'little Willie left us'—several years—I forget just how many, but——"

"Four."

"Is it, indeed? I shouldn't have said it was so long. Well, four years, my boy, is time enough for a good many official heads to drop in the basket—a President's might—and mine is there."

As he listened to the man's jesting words McLain's brain worked rapidly. The situation and the possibility of a way out were made instantly clear to him; avenues were opening up before him. If only he could persuade Judd! The horses stood still, obedient to a quick, convulsive pull on the bits which was involuntary. The reins dropped and the shaking hand of the driver was laid on the knee of the man beside him—this ex-officer of the law.

"Judd!" he implored with dry lips, thick tongue, and eyes like those of a hunted animal. "If you are out of office you don't have to do this thing! *Give me a chance —for God's sake!*"

Mr. Judd stooped again and picked up the lines.

"Look here! If you can't drive better than this you'd better take to oxen. They're safer than horses. . . .

No! I'll keep these lines myself for a while. I'm afraid of you!" Then, not unkindly, "Now say all you've got to say for yourself, boy."

And McLain pleaded as a man pleads for his life.

When the horses reached the old Bascom place they stopped of their own accord. Indeed, their second driver had not paid much more attention to them than had the first, for McLain's story was an absorbing one.

"I'll drive you home," said McLain. The conversation, long as it had been, and as slowly as the horses had walked, was not yet done. "We've got to finish this thing up now." His jaw had a determined set, for his fate still hung in the balance.

"Well, McLain," said Mr. Judd, after a wait that seemed interminable to the other. "I don't mind telling you that I always considered you more sinned against than sinning in that matter—you were nothing but a boy —and what you tell me confirms me in that opinion. If punishment is intended to be reformative instead of retaliatory, as it always should be with the young—you've had enough. I do verily believe that its purpose is accomplished in you. You are a stronger man to-day than nine-tenths of the untempted. That's my notion about it.

"And the two men in this world whose opinion I value most—my father and Dr. Dabney—have given you a clean bill of health so far as your reputation in this community goes. I wouldn't exactly trust either of them to track a criminal, but they both have a keen instinct for a good man, and they think they have found one in you. Maybe they are wrong, but *maybe* they are right. I can't tell—and I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt."

McLain's heart gave a great throb.

"Now,—taking all these things into consideration, I propose to do nothing whatever in this matter. I am

relieved of responsibility by being relieved of my office; and I think I shall not assume it voluntarily. So far as I am concerned, Mr. McLain, you are absolutely safe. I do not need to tell you that my word is to be relied upon. Take your life and make of it what you can."

The relief in the face before him would have touched a harder heart than Calvin Judd's. Age seemed to fall away from it. Whatever this thing was between them it had settled down upon the young man inconceivably in the short time since he had dropped his mask at Dr. Dabney's door, but now with this release his old self emerged from under it.

"Judd," he said, solemnly, "God helping me, I will make it something worthy of your confidence."

"I believe you will, McLain. I honestly believe it. And you can make good just where you are. I impose but one single condition upon you."

McLain looked at him without speaking, a presage of coming evil strong upon him.

"Well," he said at last, "what is it? I am not in a position to make my own terms. What's the condition?"

"That you shall give up all thought—if you have ever had any—of Genevieve Dabney."

The wheels of the vehicle turned round and round on the moon-lighted road. A twig caught in one of them seemed to occupy fully the young man's mind. It seemed every minute imminent that it would drop off; but it continued to stay and McLain continued to watch it. At last he turned to his companion.

"Oh, Judd," he said with a groan, "I can't do that! . . . I can't—do *that!*"

"You've got to!" The emphasis was so quiet but so pitiless that the man to whom the words were spoken shivered. "Have you spoken?"

Their relations were such that what McLain would have resented as an impertinence in another man he

bore without a word. It is doubtful if he even thought of it as curiosity at all.

"No. Not openly. But I have shown her in a hundred ways——"

"Oh, well, then it will be easy. Simply make up your mind to it and then let her alone. Keep away from her. If you can't stay here and do that, *get out!*"

"You know I can't do that, Judd. I have bought my place and stocked it. I can't throw it away."

"I suppose a place that was bought might be sold. And there are other farms and other localities. . . . *You can't do it, McLain!* I won't stand by and see this girl sacrificed. Why, I have known and loved these people since I've known anything. Dr. Dabney and my father have been intimate friends all their lives, and their fathers were before them. This is a friendship of generations. Do you suppose I am going to stand by, with my mouth sealed, and let her marry you—*you?* . . . No, sir! you can't do it!"

There was a finality about his manner of saying this that struck a chill to the heart of the man listening to him. It was no use to try to assert himself. He was in the power of another and the other man had the thumbscrews. His eyes were again on that senseless twig whirled round and round. He stopped the horses, took the butt of the whip and released it. Then he turned to his companion.

"Judd," he pleaded, "don't take this away from me! . . . Good God, man! haven't I lost enough?"

Calvin Judd turned away from the suffering in the man's face, but he did not relent.

"You've lost a good deal, McLain. I won't deny that. But you've got to lose this too? There's no help for it. . . . Why, you know you oughtn't to marry this girl! Now, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well then! Aren't you man enough to give it up?"

"Not unless I have to."

"Well,—you have to! That's what I am telling you now. There is no other way."

"There is another way!" McLain cried, desperately. "I will go to her and tell her everything and leave my fate in her hands—not yours!"

"You would never do it. It would be a useless humiliation if you did. I know these people, McLain. There is not a prouder, more high-minded family in the State of Missouri—nor in the world, for that matter. It is the right kind of pride, too—pride of integrity, pride of character—that's what they have. They don't care anything about money. They have what money can't buy—the inherited traditions of generations of God-fearing ancestors. Do you believe a man like that would give his daughter to you? And would the daughter, if she knew all, give herself to you?"

"I might try it and see," he said, defiantly.

"You might—but you won't. You have too much to lose. Why, McLain, don't you know that by one turn of my heel I could crush you?—so dead that you would never rise in this community or any other? . . . I could! And, by the Lord Harry! if you don't keep your hands off this girl, *I'll do it!*"

The man listening knew it was no idle threat. . . . There was no escape. . . . It was like the other things he had encountered in his life—inexorable.

"Ah-h, *Judd!*" he said at last, with an explosive breath. "You are hard on me! You are hard on me!"

"No harder than I ought to be. You have no right to marry this girl, McLain. And—you—know it! Don't you?"

"Yes."

"Then you agree to my condition?"

"I suppose I'll have to. There's nothing else I can do. *You've got me!*"

The lifelessness in his voice moved the other man to

pity. It had been the curse of Calvin Judd's official life that he could not steel his heart against suffering of body or soul.

"Now see here, McLain, brace up! You begged me for a chance in life and I've given it to you. Everything is before you except this one thing. Now make the most you can out of your life. A woman isn't the only thing this world holds for a man! You'll find that out after a while—as I have. There's business—and politics —and——"

"We will not discuss it further," said McLain, with a dignity of dismissal that left Mr. Judd feeling strangely enough that their positions were reversed. "When do you go?"

"To-morrow." He was out of the buggy now at his father's gate. McLain reached out his hand.

"Well—good-bye, Judd. I suppose I'm obliged to you for what you have done for me. I don't want to seem ungrateful. But"—he shook his head with a gesture of despair—"if you'd take your gun and blow my brains out you would add to the obligation."

"Don't be a fool, boy!" said Mr. Judd, shaking him vigorously by the hand. "You'll feel differently after a while. Come over and see my father as often as you can. It will do you both good. I leave him in your care—d'you hear? . . . Good-bye! You can rely on me, McLain."

Calvin Judd looked after the young man as he drove off.

"Lord! what a mess this world is!" he soliloquized. "But I think I did right. . . . I *think* I did." He told himself so many times before he got back to Salt Lake, for somehow he could not get McLain's despairing face out of his mind.

XV

AN AWKWARD SITUATION

FROM the vestibule Jean Dabney went straight to her room, pausing only to say good-night. She wanted to be alone with the tumultuous joy that filled her. All night she had lain with her hand pressed to her own breast as for one brief moment it had been pressed to his. He had never called her by her name before, and in her ears was sounding ever that passionate "Jean! oh, Jean!"

All day she went about with a song in her heart. It bubbled over sometimes, and Dr. Dabney in his study heard it and paused in the preparation of his sermon. "She's a happy child," he thought. "God grant she may ever be."

He had hardly settled himself again at his writing when a bright face peeped in.

"May I come in, father, or are you too busy? Honest, now."

"Come in."

She poised herself on the arm of his chair and kissed his scanty locks.

"It is a shame to interrupt you—and for nothing. I've just come to say, 'I lo'es you de'ly, de'ly, *de'ly,* pa*pa!*'"

It was what she used to say as a child. His arm closed about her. "Genevieve, have I ever been too busy to hear that?"

"No, daddy dear, you never have! Do you remember how Aunt Lavinia used to scold me for it, and how in spite of all she said I would put my head in just long

enough to say, 'I lo'es you de'ly, de'ly——' when she would catch me? I remember how it mystified me that a little thing like that—just a minute—could be an interruption."

"I told her at last never to do it again. I knew you came to me as you would have gone to your mother." He sighed softly, feeling his daughter's loss.

"Father, dear, in those days I never missed my mother. You and Aunt Lavinia filled her place completely in my childish heart. But—isn't it strange?—I came to you this morning because I've been thinking so much about her. Somehow she seems so near to me to-day."

The manuscript was pushed back, and he took from his drawer a picture painted on ivory of a young girl strangely like Jean.

"She had it painted for me when we were first engaged."

"She must have loved you, father, to have gone through all that stormy courtship for your sake."

"Yes," he said, simply, "yes. Could you ever love and sacrifice like that, my dear?" He pinched her cheek playfully.

"I—I think I could, father." Her hot cheek was buried in his coat.

"Some time, perhaps, some time," he said, gently. Then, "A great love, or a great sacrifice, ennobles life, my child. Its effects are never lost."

"Tell me about her, father."

The sermon waited while he lived over his courtship days that he might bring nearer to her the mother she had never known. She went from him with a new tenderness in her heart for them both.

But the happiness within her was bubbling up too much for repression. She put on her jacket and ran races with old Rover down to the "big road" and back, and back again, until Miss Lavinia said it was too cold to be out. Too cold! Her blood was rioting at such a

pace that she dropped, breathless and rosy, at Miss Lavinia's feet, wondering if that dear lady had ever really been young.

"Auntie, did you ever have a love affair? But of course you have. They say every woman has one, and you are sweet enough to have had a dozen. Why, Aunt Lavinia, you are blushing! Now tell me! I am dying to hear a love story!"

And sitting before the fire as the day waned, with the sympathetic speaking face of the girl turned toward her, Miss Lavinia told the little tragedy that had lain folded in her breast all these years. It seemed very pitiful to Jean. She suffered more at the moment than Miss Lavinia, to whom it was now but a fragrant memory. Must love always end in tragedy? How strange that her father and Aunt Lavinia could still smile! Surely if——

It was never finished. She went upstairs for the apron she had made for Aunt Phyllis and to look for the liniment she had promised Uncle Ephraim, pausing as she went to catch up the cat and tickle him behind the ear in the way he liked. Every creature came in for a share of her exuberant affection to-day. Oh, it was a beautiful world! and everything in it so dear! . . . And he was coming!

At supper she had on the dress he liked, and little Ephraim had been directed to put extra wood in the back hall. Then through the long evening she waited, listening for the hoofbeats that did not come.

"Genevieve, I have a letter here from your Aunt Josephine. She says——"

"Oh, father! she isn't coming up? Not in the winter!"

Never had Aunt Josephine seemed less desirable.

"No. The letter is about Tom. He has returned."

"Returned! Why, I thought he had decided to stay a year and a half."

"I believe he has tired of it, or something of the kind. At all events, he is back. She wants him to come up here for a while. I think she is troubled about Tom."

"What's the matter?"

"I can't quite gather that from her letter. You may read it."

"Well, in all my life," Jean said as she folded up the letter, "I have never known before of Aunt Josephine's writing to see if her plans were convenient to us. Tom has come when he pleased and stayed as long as he liked. Why doesn't he write himself? Do you suppose he is ill?"

"It sounds so."

"What are you going to do, father?"

"Ask him to come, of course. You would like to have him, wouldn't you?"

"Ye-es," she said in the way truthful people have of prevaricating. Never had she wished it less. Tom always demanded her whole time. She looked at the clock. It was too late to expect him now.

In her room she chided herself. Of course he would not come to-night. She might have known that. He would wait until Sunday when he could see her alone.

At church Jean looked in vain for McLain. The anthem was crippled for want of a tenor and laid aside. After the service she heard her father ask Mrs. Debo if he were ill. No, Mrs. Debo said, there was no reason why he did not come except that he didn't want to—same reason that kept most people away.

The long afternoon passed, but no McLain appeared. What could it mean? . . . She pondered the question deeply. It would have been strange at any time; scarcely a Sunday since he had been in his own home had passed without his riding over to The Manse; but after that night in the vestibule—her cheeks grew hot—what could it mean? She went to her window then and looked out toward The Oaks. There were no leafy

barriers now to obscure a gleam, but there was none in sight. Resolutely she set her lamp in front of the window. He should see at least that her light was burning steadily.

It was a week or ten days after this that they met accidentally.

They had learned at The Manse that Colonel Judd was ill, and she had gone over with her father to see him. To her amazement they found McLain installed as nurse. . . . Yes, he had sent for the doctor and was acting under his directions. Mrs. Debo, of course, must take this time to sprain her ankle! The Colonel would have to do with him until the doctor could find a nurse.

He explained in answer to Dr. Dabney's question that he had gone over a few days before to play chess and found the Colonel quite ill.

"Headed straight for pneumonia," came a wheeze from the bed.

He supposed it was, McLain admitted. He had gone home to consult Mrs. Debo, who told him exactly what to do, made a "pneumonia jacket," supplied him with flaxseed for poultices, and told him to send for Dr. Llewellyn at once, no matter what the Colonel said. He had sent his own man off without asking permission. . . . Yes, Dr. Llewellyn said Mrs. Debo had advised exactly the right thing, and the Colonel was now out of danger, thanks to her and the doctor. He minimized his own part in the case, but the Colonel's eyes rested upon him with the affection of a father.

They soon rose to go and McLain went to the carriage with them. At the door Colonel Judd called the minister back.

"He saved my life," he wheezed, hoarsely. "He worked over me like a son—like a son! Tell you—about it—when I get more—breath."

Jean and McLain, left to themselves, were feeling the

awkwardness of their position. The thoughts of both were upon their last parting. Then Jean, with the frankness which was a part of her nature, said:

"Mr. McLain, have I done anything to offend you?"

He looked at her a moment without speaking. . . . And he could never explain it! . . . Then he shook his head.

"No; you couldn't offend me,—Jean."

"You were not over Sunday, and I didn't know——"

"The blue devils had me Sunday, body and soul. I couldn't get away from them. And since that"—he knew that an explanation was due her—"well, since that you see I've been pretty busy here."

"Of course. And I am so glad you could be here. But my cousin, Tom Alexander, is coming to-morrow. Come over and see him, can't you?"

"I certainly shall."

Her father came out just then, and after a few words about the Colonel they said good-bye. She thought much as they rode home about what he had said. She was glad it was nothing worse than the "blue devils" on Sunday—if it really was that. . . . But his manner was so constrained—and why should it be? . . . She wondered if he had seen her light. . . . And why should he have shut out his from her?

XVI

TOM

DR. LLEWELLYN was at The Manse when young Mr. Alexander arrived. While the family were welcoming the wanderer he was making some observations on his own account. His practised eye was taking in at a glance a few things that were to come upon the rest more gradually. Dr. Dabney had told him of that portion of Mrs. Alexander's letter in which she expressed her conviction that Tinkling Spring would be a desirable place for her son just at this time, and asked that he be put under Dr. Llewellyn's care. He had had his suspicions at the time, and when the young gentleman was ushered in and he had one keen look at his eyes and his mouth his mental diagnosis was confirmed.

"Smart old lady that!" was his inward comment. "She's sent him up here to sober off."

It did not occur to Dr. Llewellyn that Mrs. Alexander had any other motive than a selfish desire to relieve herself of the responsibility and trouble incident to this process. But there he underrated her. In truth, Mrs. Alexander—foiled in her laudable intention of securing Mr. Maltby's money to the family—was just turning her agile mind in other directions for her niece when her own son appeared rather prematurely on the field. His appearance was a distinct shock to her. His frequent calls for money in these last few months had given her some uneasiness, but she was not prepared for the deterioration which was apparent in a few hours' intercourse. Tom had always been more or less addicted to gentlemanly drinking—all young men were, she sup-

posed; but this—this really was alarming, not to say disgraceful. He had lost his grip of himself,—a thing no young man in his position should ever do. Still Mrs. Alexander could not ignore the fact that it was a thing which many young men in his position *did* do; nor blot from her memory the recollection that one of these young men had been Tom's own father. A fear of "the sins of the fathers"—unknown until now—fell upon her. Was there anything in heredity, after all? She had all her lifetime scouted such an idea; but Tom's appearance, his recklessness, and the occasional thickness of his tongue, coupled with his striking resemblance to his father under similar conditions, startled her out of her complacent beliefs. If there should be anything in it——

After a week's observation of her son and his trans-Atlantic habits she became seriously alarmed, and being prone to sidestep any disagreeable responsibility she determined that the best place for Tom was not with his old companions but in some retired spot away from the temptations of the city. And what would be so natural and so safe a refuge as the home of her brother-in-law? After a week of her tearful remonstrance and continuous nagging, her son agreed with her.

It is only just to Mrs. Alexander to say that at first there was no ulterior motive in the selection of The Manse as an asylum for her son. It was his physical condition alone that influenced her. But as she reflected on that home and its inmates and the associations it would afford him, another and more subtle thought came into her mind. Genevieve had always had a great influence over Tom,—so much in fact that his mother had resented it in days past as weak women often resent any influence for good upon their children which is stronger than their own; but now, in her time of need, it presented itself to her in altogether a different light.

She had become thoroughly alarmed about Tom's

condition; this trouble was deeper seated than she had at first supposed; and with his tendencies (Mrs. Alexander was becoming a rapid convert to the heredity theory) —he would need all the help that could be given him. . . . Well,—who could ever influence a man as a wife could? —this in disregard of the patent fact that she herself had been a wife with the duty of reclamation laid upon her and had signally failed. Tom had always been fond of Jean—a fondness which she, having the highest good of both at heart, she told herself, had frowned upon. But now—well, it was different now! She looked upon the coarsening lines of her son's face in a panic of apprehension. . . . Yes, if he were really in earnest about this old fondness for Jean she would be quite reconciled to it under the circumstances,—even though Jean had but little of this world's goods. When she reached this point she sighed deeply, feeling herself to be a mother ready to sacrifice lifelong ambitions for her son. As to any other sacrifice Mrs. Alexander was as unseeing as the eyeless fish to which she had once compared her brother-in-law. Sweet, pure, innocent Jean was to be hurried to the altar with as little compunction as a lamb is led to the slaughter!

"Yes, it is serious," Dr. Llewellyn was saying in response to the minister's question as he followed him to the door, "but it is not contagious." A plain talk followed.

"I think you must be mistaken, doctor!" said Dr. Dabney, shocked beyond expression.

"I am not mistaken," the physician asserted. "I'll venture to say his suitcase is loaded up now. You'd better see to it that he has no opportunity to get more, doctor, or else ship him back home. If you really want to do the best for him let Jean drive around with him wherever he goes. She'll keep him straight. You'd better tell her about it."

"Is that necessary, William? I hesitate——"

"I know. You hesitate to let her know there is any wickedness in this wicked world. But you can't always keep it from her, doctor. It will put her on her guard."

To McLain Tom Alexander's coming was a godsend. It made his own absence from The Manse less noticeable. He had gone over after the meeting at Colonel Judd's to call on young Alexander as he had promised Jean to do. He could not do less in common decency, he told himself. He would keep his promise to Judd, of course. He had renounced all thought of trying to win her; but he would not be a boor, even for Judd. He would still go, but would let his visits grow fewer. In this way he could keep the letter of his promise and yet allay suspicion as to any sudden cause for the breaking off. Perhaps by throwing himself into work he might in time——

He never got any farther than that. He knew he should never "get over it," as the phrase goes, and he felt like a scoundrel to leave her thinking he had got over it. The memory of that night in the vestibule was ever smarting within him. What must she think?

"What are you doing with yourself these days, Mr. McLain?" asked Dr. Dabney, genially, in the course of that visit. "We don't see much of you lately."

Jean's face burned, but she listened for the reply.

"I've been over with the Colonel a good deal, doctor, —he is not doing as well as I should like—and then I am arranging with Mr. Bascom to look up some stock. He has very kindly agreed to take me around the country to see some that he thinks is specially fine. My knowledge is so limited that it is very good of him, I'm sure."

"So it is," said the minister, thoughtfully. "I hear John is thinking of running for County Treasurer."

He looked up in mild surprise at the laugh this elicited.

"Mr. McLain," said Tom, who had taken an instant liking to the young man his mother had warned him against, "I wish you would let me go along on some of those trips. I'd like nothing better."

"Nor I!" McLain spoke heartily. "I have a good horse that I'll put at your disposal and we will go whenever Mr. Bascom says the word. Perhaps we can go without him. You are a judge of stock, of course!"

Listening to the jests and badinage that followed Jean could hardly believe in the "blue devils" of Sunday, so like his old self was McLain.

"I understand you are a member of this famous church choir I've been hearing about," remarked Tom when McLain was starting.

"Yes," he answered, with a stinging remembrance of Calvin Judd's reference to his "church affiliations."

"Jean here has been telling me about your choir practicings, and I'm serving notice right now that I propose to take your place for a while as escort to the prima donna. I am interested in music myself."

"I resign," laughed McLain, with a quick throb of thankfulness that this at least had arranged itself so naturally.

"Shall you be at practice, Mr. McLain?" asked Jean. "And at church Sunday?"

He hesitated. He had intended to give that up; but as he looked into her face and realized what it would be to give up even seeing her his resolution failed him. He had never promised Judd to renounce the church services! The fire that had died down flamed up again. He would go to church. He would sit beside her. He would go to choir practice. He would sing from the same book with her, and Judd be——

"Oh, yes," he said, cheerfully. "I'll be there."

Outside, away from her, and the pall settling down upon him again, he realized the folly of it.

"The truth is, I ought to go away—ought to give

up the whole thing—farm, and prospects, and girl. But . . . oh, damn Judd!"

He cursed more than Judd—himself and his fate and the folly that had brought him to these straits. That he, a free man, should be bound by another's will! . . . Revolt was stirring within him. Why should he submit to it? . . . The answer came to him with a directness that made the sweat stand out on his face, winter though it was. . . . "McLain, I could crush you with one turn of my heel!" . . . And it was true! He could do it—and he would! . . . Well, he must stay away, that was all—or go away.

He did not go away; and he did not stay away, though it is fair to say that he tried with such strength as was left in him to do both. He brought out his maps of Canada and again looked up Saskatchewan. . . . It was a long way off! He might never see her again for the rest of his life. He tried to imagine himself there, wrestling with virgin soil and primitive conditions, safeguarded by the Canadian Rockies in an alien land, his past behind him and his future ahead. He could grow up with the country there; get rich, perhaps; gain standing and influence, possibly. But—what was the use?

Suppose he should do all this, he considered. What would she be doing down here while he was piecing out a life of substitutes up there? Living at The Manse the colourless life her Aunt Lavinia had led, raising chickens and flowers and satisfying her maternal instincts with other people's children? And when her father was gone —for he couldn't live always—what would she do? Live alone like Miss Pattie Dandridge? Somehow imagination failed him. . . . Sell herself to Maltby after all and go abroad to share his millions and the ashes of his burned out life? No, she would never do that! . . . Would she yield at last to a love that had enveloped her from her childhood? This was more

serious than the Maltby contingency, but still he could not bring himself to believe she would every marry Tom. She was too sensible to take that risk.

Well, what then? Would she marry in time some good farmer around here and settle down on—well, perhaps on the Bascom place, which would be for sale, he told himself grimly, if he went to Saskatchewan? Wouldn't that be the irony of fate? She would have a chance at the house then, and the flower garden, and the box borders, and the shell walks,—and could fix them up to suit herself. . . . Heigh-ho! What a fizzle life was, anyway!

He shut up his maps and ordered his horse. He would not go to Saskatchewan—just yet. That much was definitely decided.

"Jean," said Tom one night as they rode home from choir practice—she had been lecturing him on the subject of his habits, for he had escaped her surveillance and had been drinking again, "I wish you would marry me. Won't you?"

"Why, no, Tom!" Jean said, indignantly. "You know I wouldn't marry you. How could I? When you do as you have been doing lately I don't even respect you."

"That is one of your puritanical ideas, Jean. Women marry men every day without respecting them."

"Do they? Well, that's the kind you'll have to seek then. It wouldn't do for me. You know, Tom, that I think a lot of you. I can truthfully say that I am very fond of——"

He moved closer to her and caught at her hand.

"Jean!"

His cousin increased the distance between them and discreetly put her hand in her muff.

"But the man that I really love well enough to marry will have to be one that I can look up to—one that I

can lean on. Tom, don't you know that every woman worth the name feels that way? . . . Well——"

The break was sufficiently significant.

"Jean," he said with shamefacedness—he was enough of a man to feel the lash—"I know you can't look up to me—now. I don't know that you ever could—but I would always love you. You know that because I always have loved you. And I should always care for you——"

"When I wasn't caring for you!"

"——and protect you."

"Protect me! Heavens! what would you have done last night at protecting me? No! It wouldn't do, Tom!"

"I know I am not worthy of you," he said, humbly. It argued something for his love and the character of his temper that he was not resentful of her plain speaking.

"No," agreed Jean, coolly, "you are not worthy of any decent woman as you are now."

He caught at the possibility of reform suggested by the limiting clause.

"You could make a man of me, Jean."

"When I marry," returned his cousin with spirit, "it will be somebody that can make a man of himself—and has done it. You can depend on that!"

"Jean," he said, irrelevantly, "is it McLain?"

"What are you talking about?" she parried.

"I know there is somebody."

"I shall never marry," she announced with decision, "until I find a man like father—as strong in principle and as gentle with women."

"You'll wait some time," he said, grimly. "There's comfort in that, at any rate."

Then she grew confidential, glad to turn the conversation into safer channels.

"Do you know, Tom, there are some disadvantages about having such a father as I have? It dwarfs other

men. It really does. When I come to measure up by him any man I have ever known that—well, that——"

"——that wanted to marry you. Speak it out? There's nothing disgraceful about it!"

"That thought he did (you'll find out later that you don't)—somehow he always seems too small to fill the niche."

"That's because the niche is too high," he said, following her lead. "You've got it in the clouds. Bring it down to earth and the man may look larger. This is a prosaic world, Jean."

"It is, Tom; dreadfully prosaic. That's why the man I marry must have all the old-fashioned virtues that I am accustomed to."

"Such as——"

"Oh,—such as honesty—self-control—temperance—sobriety—tenacity of purpose—abstinence—abstemiousness—restraint of the appetites——"

"Go on!" he jeered. "Don't stop. Here's a pocket-dictionary when you get to the end of your vocabulary. Well, at any rate, I'm honest, and you put that first. So I am not without hope."

They rode without speaking for a few rods, and then, as though the subject were exhausted, Tom broke out:

"Say, Jean, McLain's an awfully nice fellow! Do you believe he's a Mormon?"

"No! That is purely the product of your mother's imagination."

"That's where I get my temperance—and self-control," he said. And the conversation glided easily to other topics. An offer of marriage from Tom was of such common occurrence that it hardly made a ripple in their intercourse.

Tom was over at The Oaks often as the weeks went by. He was restless and uneasy in his craving for

drink and there was something about the companionship of the man over there that steadied him.

"McLain," he said one day, "they don't know the meaning of the word *temptation* at Uncle Dabney's—nor the word *struggle,* either! . . . Now, you do."

"Why, Tom, I never drank in my life."

"I can't help it. You know!"

Jean spoke to McLain one night about her cousin. Tom being temporarily out of commission as an escort he was taking her home from practice. It was the first time they had been alone since the night of Calvin Judd's visit, and as they drove along the road they were both tingling with the consciousness of it.

"We are very glad to have Tom with you so much, Mr. McLain. We feel so safe with him there. I hope it doesn't trouble you."

"It doesn't. I am glad to have him come. He is a good fellow and I like him."

"I can hardly understand your friendship—as he is now," she sighed. "You have never seen him at his best."

"Tom is another derelict," he said with a short laugh. Then he added, seriously, "I hardly think you know the fight he is putting up. It is terrific sometimes."

"It doesn't seem to me he is trying at all," she said.

It was not long after this that Tom went over to the old Bascom place in a gloomy mood. There had arrived that morning a box of books from St. Louis for the "Tinkling Spring Library."

"What's the matter with you, Tom?" demanded McLain, after several unsuccessful attempts at conversation. "You're as glum as the Sphinx."

Tom paid no heed to the interrogation nor to the comment beyond a shake of the head that might mean anything or nothing, and pursued his own train of thought. Seeing that he was not disposed to talk

McLain spared him the effort, and they sat in silence. Finally Tom broke out:

"She ought never to marry Maltby! Between you and me, McLain, that fellow is a low-down rake, with all his money—and his manners. I told Uncle Dabney a few plain facts about him when he wrote to me——"

"He wrote, did he?" asked McLain, interestedly.

"Yes, he wrote. What do you know about it?"

"That you had a letter from him. You are telling me now."

"You see my mother's heart was set on making a match there if it was a possible thing. Women are queer. They are forever overlooking things at the wrong time. Well, for some reason Uncle Dabney wrote to me for information about Maltby's character, relying upon my discretion—ahem!—and my family pride and my affection for Jean,—cousinly, you understand, etc., etc."

"And he got it?"

"Yes, sir! He got it and got it straight. I felt that he had a right to ask and I a right to answer. As I looked at it this was the time for both of us to speak out. He must have said something pretty forcible to my mother about it, for she's thrown up the sponge in that fight. In fact," he said, rather sheepishly, but with direct intent, "she is backing me now in mine."

"Ah?" commented McLain, cheerfully. This at least was good news.

"Yes. She used to be dead set against it. I have had many a fight to get up here. You see, my mother is a born matchmaker and she had other designs for both of us. But I really believe now she would be willing to see Jean turn her head my way. Of course from a money point of view she would do better to take Maltby. But he is no man for a girl like Jean."

"Are you?" McLain could not refrain from asking.

"No, McLain, I'm not. I own up to that. But, by

Jove! I believe she could make something of me. If she couldn't, nobody could."

McLain restrained an inclination to throttle him. Instead he went quietly on with the case.

"But you admit the possibility that she might fail?"

"Oh, yes. I'm humble, if nothing more."

"Well, suppose she should try it and fail. It wouldn't be her fault, you know, that she failed—you can't help a man that won't help himself. Suppose she should take you with this idea a girl has of marrying a man to reform him—and you should go on as you are going now (that's all you'd have to do)—and she realized after a while that she *had* failed—and it was too late then for her to go back to her sweet, pure life with her old father.—Oh, no, Tom, you'd better shoot her than to lead her into that! She's too good to be a drunkard's wife."

"A drunkard! Come now, McLain, that's putting it a little too strong! I could stop."

"Then stop! why don't you?" cried McLain, roughly, "before you try to get her away from a home like hers to the one that you could give her. What right have you to take a life like yours to her and ask her to share it?"

"Now, do you know that is exactly what she intimated to me herself?" said Tom, with interest.

"Oh, you've asked her, have you?"

"Yes, I have. And she went for me just about the way you are doing. Said she didn't even respect me, and how could she love a man she couldn't respect, and all that."

McLain's face hardened. "She's right," he said, harshly. "No man should try to win a woman's love when he cannot command her respect."

"Oh, bosh! I'd get her quick enough if I could, and so would you if you loved her, whether we could command her respect or not. You know we would. Any man would—unless it was Uncle Dabney, and there

would never be any question of respect in his case. I suppose everybody respected Uncle Dabney when he was an infant in arms. Well, some people are born respectable——"

"And some achieve respectability," said McLain, significantly.

"And some have it thrust upon them! . . . *Lord!* how I'm having it thrust upon me over at the house! . . . McLain, give me a drink!"

McLain had his horse put up instead and sent Sandy over to The Manse to say that Mr. Alexander would stay at The Oaks that night. He saw that the thirst was upon him. Before morning a man was despatched for Dr. Llewellyn, and together they worked over him.

"McLain," said Dr. Llewellyn, energetically, when the patient was safely under the influence of a narcotic, "I wish this young fellow would go back to St. Louis."

"Why?"

"He's been here long enough. Let his mother take care of him. She's the one to do it. His conduct is troubling Dr. Dabney. But," seeing that McLain was still expectant, "if you want the real reason it is because I want him away from Jean. He's in love with her, do you know it? and that mother of his, with a cold-blooded determination to save her son at all costs, is backing him up in it."

"Do you think that will be likely to influence Miss Dabney much?" The quiet significance of this was not lost on the doctor.

"No, I don't. That's what I am relying upon most to save her from it. The trouble is you never can tell what a girl is going to do about these things. Let her get the besotted notion in her head that she can reform a man, and nothing will do but she must try it. Others have failed, but *she* can do it! That,—with a woman's capacity for self-sacrifice—oh, hang it all! I wish he would go home!"

"She never would do it, doctor," encouraged McLain, remembering Tom's confidence but respecting it. "She has too much sense."

"Oh, they none of 'em have any sense when it comes to a love affair! The way marriage is entered into these days makes me wonder there are not more divorces than there are. That's the real trouble about divorce—marriage is too lightly thought of."

"Do you think she would be the kind of woman to enter into it lightly or unadvisedly? It doesn't seem so to me."

"No. But she is exactly the kind that might go into it if she got this confounded notion of reforming him. You see, McLain, I have some feeling of responsibility in this matter. When I found out what his mother had sent him up here for I suggested to Dr. Dabney that about the best help they could give him was to let Jean keep him pretty well in sight. I was thinking about his physical condition, you know. Well, she's done it conscientiously, and by George! it's given him the very opportunity they wanted. I wish you would cut in there yourself! You've been altogether too modest since he has been here. I'm disappointed in you!"

McLain shook his head.

"No. I'm out of the running, doctor."

Dr. Llewellyn gave him a keen glance, at which he smiled but reddened.

"So? Well, I'm sorry."

To Dr. Llewellyn's honest mind there was but one thing that could cause a young fellow like the one before him to drop out of a race like that. McLain left him to draw his own conclusions, and they were to the effect that the young man had dropped out prematurely and needed a little prodding.

"Well, then," he said, cheerfully, "in that case I can afford to unleash Gresham."

"Who is Gresham?" McLain asked, though he knew.

" A young fellow I'm trying to make a doctor of. I'm going to succeed too. He is a bright fellow—Gresham is,—attractive, keen as a whip, and what is better, with a clean record. No Tom Alexander business about him. I have thought of taking him into partnership with me. I'm getting tired of coming down here to look after measles and chicken-pox and old Mrs. Dunklin's lumbago. I'm thinking of sending Gresham down to attend to this sort of thing and the night practice and I will come in for typhoid fever and pneumonia. Yes, I think he would like to come. He met Jean last spring when she was in Putney visiting. He was pleased with her. I could see that. I think he came down several times last summer to see her—but I gently conveyed to him the impression, which I supposed was correct, that the land hereabouts was pre-empted. But——"

It suddenly occurred to him that this might not be an altogether agreeable subject to his host, and he ended lamely:

" Say, McLain, where is my bed? This fellow doesn't need either of us now."

The master of The Oaks lay awake long after the man who had murdered sleep for him had wrapped the drapery of his couch about him and lain down to pleasant dreams.

He had told himself a hundred times, thinking of Tom and Maltby, that he could give her up to a good man,—one that would bring her happiness and was worthy of her. . . . Well—the good man had appeared, it seemed—the man with a " clean record." . . . And could he?

XVII

McLAIN REVOLTS

SPRING opened early that year, which was fortunate for McLain. He threw himself into his farming with desperate energy. There were no longer any slurs cast upon him by Mr. Elijah Coyt as one who made of the noble pursuit of agriculture a pastime, for Lige had been persuaded to give his time and his experience to this dilettante for hire, and it was remarked at the store that he spoke far less carpingly of his employer's slackness now than aforetime.

"He's a hustler!" was the neighbourhood verdict. "He ain't afraid of work!" And they liked him the better for it; for hard work was the element in which this jury was born, and in which it lived and moved and had its being. Mild wagers, never to be paid of course, had been laid down at Henyon's through the winter on whether or not McLain would "stick"—with odds against it. Nothing is so discredited in a community that has gained its knowledge through inherited traditions as that variety of agricultural wisdom that comes after maturity and is derived from books. It may be true wisdom, and advanced at that, but if it has not come down by word of mouth from father to son it is under the ban. "The fathers have told us" is the orthodox way in the rural mind.

It had been the common belief, expressed with some winks, that when the time of actual work came the "book farmer wouldn't be thar." But the ploughing was done, corn-planting well along, and McLain was still "thar." His stock was beginning to rise.

But if the whole truth had been known—and the whole

truth rarely is known—it was not so much temperamental energy that was driving the man on, certainly not so much a love of gain, as his fear of himself. If work failed him he was lost. There would be nothing left then but Saskatchewan.

During the winter he and John Bascom, who really was a prospective candidate and a forehanded man, had scoured the county for stock (and constituents)—the best of both that could be found, for Tinkling Spring was in one of the banner stock counties of the State, and as to the other matter, John Bascom saw to it that Mr. McLain (and himself) went to representative men whose influence would count at the primaries.

Before the coming of Calvin Judd the young man had greatly enjoyed these business trips. They brought him in contact with a number of men whom otherwise he might have been years in knowing or might never have known, and he wanted to study the people at first hand. He was aware of Mr. Bascom's ambitions and was glad to put in an oar in his behalf in the way of suggestions that county officers should be men beyond reproach—that the country was waking up to the fact that integrity in its public servants was the one thing needful, etc.—all of which he fully held to, and some of which he hoped might eventually be placed to Mr. Bascom's account. It is only fair to him to say that it was the incorruptible John Bascom he always had in mind.

He had a natural turn for politics and he spoke with convincing earnestness, backed up as it was by the purchase of a good many fine animals without much haggling over the price. John Bascom came to count upon him as one of his political assets in the coming campaign. He himself was not a ready speaker, though a man of well-known probity, and McLain's clear grasp of political situations and his keen way of presenting them often surprised him. A mutual respect and esteem was being cemented between the two.

After that memorable night in January the old zest in these jaunts was lacking; but life goes on whether we are in the mood for it or not, and we must perforce follow its lead. The cattle were here; the feeding must be done; and new animals must be added to his herd if he was to continue. It might not prove worth while to continue, but that must be tested, and in the meantime—well, in the meantime, McLain kept away from Dr. Dabney's, rode much with John Bascom, talked politics to keep from thinking about more dangerous things, and got out of it what he could. As it turned out he was destined to get more out of it than he had ever counted upon.

McLain dropped out of the choir after Tom left. He was too tired when the day's work was done, he explained to Jean, and Jean did no more urging. It made her cheeks burn to remember with what utter freedom and lack of reserve she had insisted upon his joining. Not for worlds would she do it now. A constraint had fallen upon them and she could not be the first to break through it.

What was it that had come between them? She hardly ever saw him now that Tom was gone. And it was not because he was busy. She knew better than that. Once she saw him in the back of the church, and he was looking at her with a gaze that fairly burned. . . . It was not that he didn't care. She felt sure of it after that. But what was it?

McLain should have left the church when he left the choir, but he could not bring himself to sever this last bond. He had never promised Judd that he would not look at her! That was no part of his accursed bargain!

One day a strange man sat beside Jean singing tenor. He had a good voice too, and looked the gentleman. McLain watched him savagely.

"Who was the tenor?" he asked Mrs. Debo afterwards, knowing her for a born news-gatherer.

"A Dr. Gresham, so I hear. Miss Lavinia says he was down at their house for over Sunday and Jean she persuaded him to help in the choir. Maybe he'll take it regular. They say he's talkin' about settlin' in this neighbourhood."

McLain said nothing more. He was thinking, "The man with the 'clean record'! . . . Well, he looks it."

That Sunday afternoon was a season long drawn out. He got out the maps before it was half over. . . . Perhaps it would be better to go after all. Things couldn't keep on this way forever. . . . But what would he do with the place? Give it up and acknowledge defeat? No man liked to do that, and still—who was there to care whether it were defeat or victory?

He put up his maps and went over to see Colonel Judd. He had fallen into the habit of spending his Sunday afternoons there. The old gentleman was lonely, he told himself, knowing as he said it that it was his own loneliness he was fighting off. Lonesomeness is hard to bear at twenty-five or six.

On this particular day the very spirit of unrest possessed him. His plans were at sea. He talked it over with himself as he walked along the country road, forcing himself to meet present and future conditions and come to some decision. He could stay here, probably in safety, for the rest of his life,—and that life might drag out to the limit of Colonel Judd's. He turned from the thought with sick repulsion. Length of days was not always the supreme good; at present it seemed the supreme evil. A benumbing conviction was fastening itself upon him that work had failed him. He was not getting from it the help he had a right to expect, and he had tried it faithfully. He had risen up early and toiled late; he had not eaten the bread of idleness; but—*was* there nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink? How could he make his soul "enjoy good in his labour"? Thus far he had only

succeeded in deadening his soul with the narcotic of bodily weariness. That was something—for present necessities—but could a man go on that way indefinitely? Why, he would better be dead! . . . To eat and sleep and rise up to labour! Was this all there was of life? This was vegetation. The veriest clod of humanity did this! And what was the use? For whom did he labour and bereave his soul of good?

He hardly knew himself for the same man that had purchased the Bascom place and looked forward so buoyantly to a work of reconstruction. Where was his courage gone? . . . There was a quick explosive breath then. No, no! Certainly there was more in the world for him than this! To eat, to sleep, and rise up to labour. To eat, to sleep, and rise up to labour. Why, it was an endless treadmill! A man might carry a load for a long, long time, up hill and over many obstacles, if there were an object in view—but—a treadmill! Eternally climbing and never getting anywhere! . . . No!

Why should he stay? Beyond these prairies was the whole wide world. Why should he either stay here or bury himself in a wilderness? A man was as much lost in London or Paris as in the mountain fastnesses. And with so much in the world to see why should he be tied to one spot? He had been to China and Japan, but there were the islands of the sea, and Australia. It was said that Australia was a most interesting place to visit. Fortunately, there was no need for the money question to obtrude itself. . . . He could go to Australia if he wanted to. . . . But did he want to?

He anathematized himself for his indecision. Why couldn't he make up his mind to go—and then go? . . . Well, he answered this fierce interrogatory, a man hated to throw up his hand and acknowledge defeat. "But at any rate, I'm used to it," he said aloud, with bitter scorn. "Defeat seems to be my portion."

When he reached Colonel Judd's the old gentleman was busy with business papers.

"I'm setting my house in order, Archer," he said, motioning toward the desk. "That last spell admonished me. Ah, well! 'One gathereth and another scattereth abroad.' It's a pity when it can't even be one's own son."

McLain noticed that the paper he had in his hand was marked, "Last Will and Testament."

"Don't do it, Colonel!" he said, feeling sudden pity for a son disowned. "Don't do it! Life is too short —and too hard!"

"Calvin hasn't used me right." The old man's voice quavered with grief and indignation.

"No. But maybe there was something you don't know about. Better forgive him!"

"Whose grand-daddy are you?" cried the old gentleman, tartly.

"I'm speaking as a son, Colonel. I would give all I possess for one word of forgiveness. But no voice comes back from the grave."

The old man's eyes fell before the sorrowful gaze of the young man. He sat with mutely working lips and his head moved slightly in protest; but at last the hand which held the document relaxed, and it slipped into the waste basket.

"How's your corn?" he asked, abruptly.

"Nearly in. But it's hard work."

The Colonel looked up sharply. There was a something in the tone he did not like.

"I understand they've been betting down at the store that you'll find it too hard and give it up."

"Have they?"

There was not enough vim in the voice to suit the old gentleman. "I tell 'em to wait and see,—that they don't know the man."

"I am afraid you don't yourself, Colonel. Sometimes I think I'd better give it up."

"*What!* Give up your farm just as you have got started! Stuff and nonsense! You will never do it!"

"No, I don't suppose I shall. But sometimes I think I'd better."

"Look here, Archer,"—the old gentleman was dismayed at the young man's condition—"what you need is companionship. It is not good for man to be alone. The Scriptures tell us so, and my observation bears it out. I have a plan for you."

"I am receptive to plans." This may have been true, but he was hardly prepared for what Colonel Judd propounded.

"How would you like to have a boarder?"

"A boarder! *I* have a boarder? Well, your suggestion has the charm of novelty, certainly. Who would be my boarder?"

"A nice young fellow of about your own age—which is what you need." He was thinking astutely that it would not be a bad idea for McLain to have a medical adviser near him night and day. This talk of giving up was most alarming. Dr. Llewellyn had communicated to Colonel Judd his fears for McLain at one time and a feeling of anxiety was newly awakened in that direction.

"Who is your boarder, Colonel?"

"Have you met this young Gresham that has been coming down here lately?"

"No."

McLain spoke shortly. This was confirmation. It must be common talk to have reached the Colonel.

"He's thinking of settling here in this neighbourhood, I understand. Dr. Llewellyn says——"

"Why should a man—a doctor—want to settle in the country?"

"Why shouldn't he? Perhaps he likes the country—as you did—or thought you did." McLain ignored this thrust and the Colonel went on. "I think he is coming as a sort of partner of William Llewellyn's—to look after the country end of the practice and call Llewellyn in in severe cases. This is what I gathered from William. Well, he is trying to get a boarding place. What would you think of it?"

"I can't take him. Why, I shouldn't think of such a thing. How could I with my house in its present condition?"

"Why don't you put that house in repair?" asked Colonel Judd, impatiently. "You were full of plans for it at first."

McLain shook his head. "Plans are not always lasting, Colonel. Mine seldom come into port. They are lost at sea." Then, noticing the look of perturbation on his host's face, he bestirred himself. "Where is this young duck staying now? I noticed him at church this morning."

"At Dr. Dabney's for the present. I suppose it will end in his staying there if he can't get any other place. The good parson wouldn't turn him out of doors, you know."

McLain did not stay long with his old friend that day. He wanted to be alone and think over this most disconcerting news. Six months ago he would have welcomed into the neighbourhood a young, intelligent, well-bred young man of about his own age as a distinct acquisition. But now—to have her thrown with him day by day and evening by evening (there was the rub), as she would be if this man became an inmate of the house, with the free and easy companionship that was not only possible but inevitable. The wistaria over the porch would be blossoming soon and she and Gresham would enjoy it as she and he himself had done one year

ago! . . . Well, why shouldn't they? She was nothing to him now, and *never could be!*

He had walked on past his own gate, not caring to give himself up either to the loneliness of his big house or the garrulity of his housekeeper. A footpath led down into the ravine over which was a substantial bridge, and down by the side of it was a dogwood tree just beginning to show promise of blossom. Farther down was a "redbud." It came to him with a pang how like a bower she had kept his sick room last year with dogwood and redbuds. It was one of the compensations of country life, she had told him laughingly, that here one could always have dogwood in its season. . . . How the little unimportant things that she had said kept coming back to him. Was it so, he wondered, that people remembered the sayings of their dead?

They had gone down through the ravine the day he brought her over to see the house. A tiny stream, easily stepped across except in time of spring freshets ran along through the ravine and before the summer was over they had made a footpath beside it, for it was an ideal place for a summer stroll, shut in as it was from the heat of the sun, and redolent of wood odours. The path ran sometimes on one side of the brook and sometimes on the other,—a log thrown across forming the bridge. He could see her now poised on the log, balancing herself uncertainly but disdaining assistance. He had thrown himself down on the side of the ravine and was living over those strolls.

The stream rambled on about as it wished, and the ravine with it, but the general direction was toward Dr. Dabney's lowland pasture, which it reached with gradually lowering banks, to pursue its way thenceforward in plain sight of man and beast. They had called it their subterranean passage, and had laughed about taking refuge there when Aunt Josephine's onslaughts grew too fierce. In reality it formed a diagonal short

cut between the two places, though, strange to say, it was not when he was in haste that it was used—for it was a path designed by Nature for loitering feet.

As the man sat looking down the dim recesses trying to trace in the distance the watercourse that wound like a thread of silver through the pinkish grey of the white oaks and the faint green of the maples, a flash of white flitted before his vision. He moved his head to catch it again. . . . What land bird had a wing like that? It looked like a gull's, but this was no place for a gull. Instantly he was back in the Salt Lake Valley, the Wasatch Mountains on the east and the Oquirrhs on the west, with the white-winged birds that Utah protects by State statute skimming around and above him. . . . There it was again! . . . Seen for a moment and then gone. What could it be?

He was getting to his feet to investigate when a ripple of laughter floated to him—laughter that he knew. He stepped behind a friendly tree trunk and watched them. It was Jean Dabney and Dr. Gresham strolling along *his* footpath—his and hers.

Almost before they had come into full view they turned and retraced their steps in a leisurely way. Evidently they were not going anywhere; it was just a Sunday afternoon walk—just such as he had taken many and many a time with her along this selfsame path. Many a time—but never again! Gresham could, but not he! He shut his teeth together and clenched his hands. . . . It would be better to go to her and tell her—and then if the worst came—as it might—*go!* It would end it at any rate.

"Jealousy is the rage of a man," said one who knew the human heart. It was a rage that possessed the soul of Archer McLain at that moment, and turned indecision into action. . . . He would end the thing!

Without giving himself time to reflect—he had re-

flected too much already, he told himself grimly, it was time now to act—he went home unfalteringly and sat down at his desk. The letter he wrote was concise and to the point. It said:

"Mr. Calvin Judd, Salt Lake, Utah.

"Dear Sir:—I will no longer be bound by the terms of our agreement. I ask you, in God's name, to release me from it. If you refuse I shall go to her and tell her all, leaving my fate in her hands. I await your reply.

"McLain."

Calling for his horse, he posted the letter himself, and then as the shadows were falling, rode on and on and on, with a wild sense of freedom such as he had not felt for years. This would end the thing, one way or another. It might mean life, or it might mean death, but it would never be passive endurance again. On and on he went, baring his head to the soft spring air and thanking God for liberty. He was a man and *he would be free!*

When he drew rein at last near his own home it was to map out a plan of procedure. Judd's reply to his letter could not reach him at best in much less than a week. If the man were by any chance away from Salt Lake it might be weeks; and if he were off prospecting, as he often was, it might be longer still. Utah had a good many attractive places for prospectors which are remote from the mails. In the meantime, what should he do? Wait for Judd's letter? "No, by Heaven!" he told himself with sudden heat. He had defied Judd. Why was he under bonds to him any longer? He would go in and try to regain the ground he had lost. Two weeks would be none too long to do that—if it could ever be done. He berated his own cowardice. Why had he given up to Judd in the first place? The ground

was surer under his feet then than it would be now. It might be that he could never win her back. It might be that when he told his tale—if he had to tell it—she would turn away from him in horror. He grew cold at the thought. . . . But, in any event, he would have these weeks of heaven to die by!

It was in pursuance of this plan that McLain sought the Tinkling Spring church that night in his buggy with a vacant place for one; that he walked boldly up into the choir after ascertaining that the tenor of the morning was now on his way to the town of Putney; that he humbly petitioned to take Jean home; and that he was soon established on the old familiar footing—with a difference. He told himself exultantly that it was exactly the same, but he knew as he said it that it was not true. There was a certain impalpable barrier between them. He could not help knowing it, but as the days went by he was moving heaven and earth to undermine it. Corn-planting waited or was left to hired help; Lige Coyt began to have his doubts again; for the time was short.

Dr. Dabney was frankly glad to have him come over again as of old. "You have been working too hard, my boy," he said, and McLain acknowledged that he had, but that he had seen the folly of it and meant to do better. It seemed good to them to hear his old-time way of laughing things off.

When about a week had elapsed he was over at The Manse for supper, and he and Jean were on the steps alone. They had been down the ravine for dogwood, and the girl's arms were full.

"There comes father," she said, "he has been over to Colonel Judd's."

McLain's conscience pricked him. He had neglected his old friend of late.

"Well, father," Jean said, as the minister sank back

in the chair the young man had placed for him, "how is the Colonel?"

"Better than I expected."

"Is he ill?" enquired McLain, quickly.

"No, not ill exactly. But the infirmities of age are telling on him."

"Did you hear any news, father?" It was a joke in the family that Colonel Judd could always tell the news.

"Yes, I did. Something that surprised me very much."

McLain stooped over and picked up a spray of dogwood from the step where it had fallen. The sense of impending danger was strong upon him.

"What, father?"

"Calvin is coming home again. He will be here day after to-morrow."

"Again?"

"Yes. I can hardly understand it." They fell into speculation as to the whys of this quick return after such a long absence.

"It must be that his conscience hurts him, father."

"I think so. And he hasn't done right. . . . Calvin hasn't done right."

As they talked it over the man to whom this news meant most sat idly tapping his mouth with the white blossoms of the dogwood. It served to hide his stiffening lips. To him Calvin Judd bore "the shears of destiny."

XVIII

CALVIN JUDD AGAIN

SPECULATION was rife in the neighbourhood as to the cause of Calvin Judd's return. That a man should ignore all ties of blood and friendship for a score of years and then find himself moved by them to the extent of two visits within the space of three months was incredible. The comments were coloured by the sympathies, kindly or otherwise, of the commentators, and perhaps somewhat by the amount of their worldly wisdom.

"Calvin has a good heart," remarked Miss Lavinia Dabney to Dr. Llewellyn. "I always said it would bring him to a sense of his duty some day."

The doctor chuckled.

"Miss Lavinia, did you ever hear about the widow and her tombstone down in Texas? . . . Well, I'll tell you about it. Calvin's case reminds me of it.

"This lady had the misfortune to lose her companion. She was greatly distressed and put up a stone over him with a hand on it pointing heavenward, and beneath it the words:

"'We shall meet again.'

"She survived him a matter of twenty years, but succumbed at last to the inevitable and was buried by his side. On her tombstone was placed by her direction a pair of clasped hands and the inscription:

"'We have met.'"

"That was very touching," said Miss Lavinia.

"Very—until some godless scamp who had compared dates scrawled under this:

"'Well, you took your time about it!'"

Miss Lavinia laughed vaguely, with the rest, her sense of humour being rudimentary, but Jean remarked with appreciation, "I always loved that story, doctor. It gets better every time you tell it."

He threw his gloves at her and turned to Dr. Dabney.

"I don't quite like the look of the thing myself. I wrote for him the other time—urged him not to put it off—though he did until it suited his convenience to come. I can't understand why he repeats the visit so soon."

"I suspect it is conscience, William." Dr. Dabney dealt in consciences and was always optimistic about their awakening. "Calvin hasn't done right by his father, and he knows it. In fact, he told me so. I think that's it."

The verdict of the neighbourhood was less charitable. "He's looking out for the property, of course." It was a matter of much discussion in a community where few things out of the ordinary ever happened. Probably there was but one man in the neighbourhood who did not express an opinion; and he was the one who knew.

Calvin Judd had sought McLain the very night of his arrival, tramping over to the Bascom place after he had seen his father safely in bed. Their talk was short and to the point. At its close Mr. Judd had said genially to the writhing man:

"I am going to grant you a reprieve, McLain,—a stay of execution, so to speak, for a fortnight. That's the length of time I have planned to be here. My stay was a short one before, and rather unsatisfactory; but this time I shall remain long enough to get acquainted with the old gentleman again, and visit around among

the neighbours. I want to get their views on politics, and the crops, and—a few other things. You are absolutely safe for two weeks, unless you precipitate something yourself. After that—well,"—he looked McLain frankly in the eye—" it depends."

The man on probation ground his teeth, but was powerless to do more.

Colonel Judd took his son over the next day to make the acquaintance of Mr. McLain, and the two men met as strangers. Mr. Judd took unfeigned interest in McLain's improvements.

" They seem pretty permanent," he remarked as they inspected the barns. " You are not building here for a day, I take it, Mr. McLain."

It was Colonel Judd that answered, laying an affectionate hand on the younger man's shoulder—a touch that Calvin Judd knew would never be laid on his.

" Not he! That's not his style of building, Calvin. These barns will be here when Archer's children to the third generation are playing under these oaks."

" H-m!" said Calvin Judd, which was noncommittal, surely.

McLain turned his back abruptly upon the barns, and they followed him.

" You haven't done much with the house yet."

" No." The voice was husky in spite of his efforts at control. " I left that—till the last."

He looked at his interlocutor with eyes in which there was an appeal.

" H-m!" said Mr. Judd again. Then he branched off into reminiscences.

" You have put in a new orchard, I see."

" Yes."

" Archer has sound ideas about life, Calvin. He says he sees no reason why country people shouldn't have all the luxuries in the way of fruit that land will grow,—that he is going to live while he lives."

"That's right!" said Calvin Judd, heartily. "Life is transitory. Let's make the most of it while we can."

When they were gone McLain went into his house and shut the door and cursed himself anew.

Calvin Judd made good his promise of visiting his old neighbours, and wherever he went the conversation in time was turned deftly and without apparent intention upon McLain. It was not difficult to do this. All that was necessary was to remark, as he was doing just now to Mr. Cartwright:

"There's a new man, I believe, on the Bascom place."

"Yes. Young McLain."

"Good neighbour?"

"First rate. He's a young fellow; don't know much about farming yet; but he's taking hold with a vim. He is getting the place in good shape. It was in bad condition when he took it. Yes," he went on with evident pride, "he is an acquisition to the neighbourhood. He is a man of means, and he's public-spirited. He's backing me right up in my fight for better roads. He's free-handed with money. He's not one of the kind that wants good roads if somebody else will pay for them. You can depend upon him to do his part."

"That's the right sort," said Calvin, tilting comfortably back on the hind legs of a split-bottomed chair that made him feel like a boy again. And the talk went on.

A few days after this Calvin Judd made a trip over to Mr. Bascom's and was persuaded to stay to dinner. John Bascom and he had been schoolfellows, and friendships that have their roots as far down as that are quickly revived.

It was as they sat together on the old-time Missouri porch at the side of the "ell," and their hearts had been mellowed by reminiscences of the old days that his question was put.

"Who is living on your old place, John?"

Mr. Bascom looked at him in surprise. "Why, McLain. You've heard your father speak of him, of course?"

Mr. Judd perceived that he had rather overdone the matter of indifference.

"Oh, yes, I've heard him speak of him—he talks about him by the yard—but," he lied promptly, "I never can remember his name."

"McLain—Archer McLain. I knew your father must have told you about him. They are great cronies."

"You know him pretty well, do you?"

"I suppose," said John Bascom, with some little pride, "that I know McLain better than any man in the county, unless it is your father and Dr. Dabney. You see, I took a good many trips with him when he was gathering up his stock—he wanted the judgment of an experienced farmer, and your father sent him to me, as long as he couldn't go about with him himself. So I have seen a good deal of him and his business dealings with men. He's pretty much of a man."

"How did you happen to have time to go around with him?"

"It was at a time when the crops were in and I had some leisure, and then"—he looked a little conscious—"I have an eye on the treasurership next fall, and——"

"I understand," said Mr. Judd, wagging an enlightened head. "I've been there!"

"McLain has a mighty good grasp on public affairs," resumed Mr. Bascom when the subject of his own candidacy had been threshed out, "remarkably so for a young man,—and a clear way of putting things."

Then followed a dissertation on McLain's political knowledge that led Mr. Judd to remark, satirically:

"I wonder you don't send him to the Legislature. A man like this must find his talents going to waste in a country neighbourhood, even as fine a one as Tinkling Spring!"

"Well, do you know," said John Bascom, from whose straightforward, honest soul satire rolled like water from a duck's back, "I don't think that would be a bad idea? We elect a United States Senator next session and in these days of bribery and corruption we need in our Legislatures men that can't be bought."

A call to dinner prevented the necessity of a reply, but at the table Mr. Judd took it up again from a different angle. He had some faith in the much vaunted intuitions of woman.

"We've just been talking about your new neighbour, Mrs. Bascom. Is he married?"

"No. Not yet."

"Oh! He's going to be, is he?"

"That's the talk," said Lizzie Bascom. "He is very attentive to Jean Dabney; or at least he was. Mattie Cartwright tells me she thinks something must have come between them lately. But I don't know. It is probably some lovers' quarrel. I certainly hope it is nothing more. Jean is a good girl, and I should like to see her do well."

"And you think she would be doing well to marry this young McLain?"

"Oh, I think so."

"Would the marriage please the doctor?"

"I don't see why it shouldn't. He is a fine young man, with no bad habits, everybody says, and Dr. Dabney, I know, feels as I do that a woman married to a good man is happier than spending her life alone."

The smile of old-fashioned conjugal love and contentment exchanged between the head of the table and the foot wrung Calvin Judd's heart. He had lost his wife at Reno. . . . He was thinking of this as Mrs. Bascom pursued the subject. If there were any two on earth whom God had joined together in lasting bonds of love, why—*why* should man put them asunder? . . . And how, if there *should* be a cataclysm in this neigh-

bourhood at the end of a fortnight could he who precipitated it fail of being swept away with it from the esteem of these people? He found each day he moved among them that he valued their esteem more and more. After the lapse of twenty years they were his own people.

The next one to be catechized was Dr. Llewellyn. Calvin Judd rode all the way from Tinkling Spring up to Putney to do it, for he had great respect for William Llewellyn's judgment.

"Do you share the general opinion about the new owner of the Bascom place?" he asked directly when the time came.

"I am not sure that I know what the general opinion is," said the doctor, coolly. "I don't make up mine that way. But I share it if what you have heard is a favourable one."

"It would not be likely to be unfavourable, coming from my father," commented Mr. Judd, drily. "He has fallen completely under the spell of this young man."

Dr. Llewellyn looked at his companion keenly. Was it possible that Calvin was jealous of McLain or feared his influence in any way? This remark looked like it. Well! If so, he would relieve that gentleman's mind (and incidentally his own) by telling him a few things that he might profitably know!

"You have nothing to fear, Calvin, from the influence of Archer McLain," he said, with significant emphasis. "Do you know about your father's will?"

"He has told me since I've been here that he would leave everything to me,"—("That's what he is here for," thought the doctor.)—"but he has not shown me the will."

"The will is all right. I've seen it."

"I take his telling me of his intentions as proof that

he has at least partially forgiven me," said Mr. Judd, "but he is rather implacable."

"He has had something to forgive, Calvin."

"Yes, he has. I haven't done right by my father. I know that. And I don't mind telling you that I realize it more since seeing what McLain—a stranger—is to him than I have ever done in all these years. It makes me feel a little sore sometimes." ("I thought so," was the doctor's mental comment.) "But there were reasons, William. I have had some hard things in my life; and you can't always explain."

"No, you can't. Most people have hard things in their lives at one time or another; and the hardest are usually the ones they can't talk about. . . . But it was not about the new will I was speaking. Did you know about the one that displaced?"

"No. He told me that he had meant at one time to make another disposition of his property, but he didn't say what."

"Nor how he happened to change his mind?"

"No."

"Well, I'm going to tell you about that, Calvin. I can see there is some little twist in your feeling toward McLain, and I shall take it upon myself to straighten it out. After Luther's death your father made a will leaving all he had to found a 'home for friendless old people—with children or without.'" Mr. Judd winced. "I am quoting from the will, you understand. It is no breach of confidence on my part to tell you this, for it was matter of common knowledge. You know your father was pretty bitter about your not coming on at the time of your mother's death,"—Calvin Judd nodded—"and when Luther died and you did not come to him in that extremity he could not forgive it. He talked about it freely to me, as he did to others—McLain included."

"McLain!"

"Yes. It was McLain that induced him to change the will. As you say, he has a great deal of influence with your father."

"McLain!" said Calvin Judd again. "Are you sure of this?"

"Absolutely. Your father told me so."

"When was this new will drawn?"

"A month or so back. No, hardly so long. I don't remember exactly."

"H-m!" Calvin Judd was visibly disturbed. "But why should McLain interest himself in my affairs?" he demanded after some thought.

"I can't tell you that, except that he is always for the under dog, and I suppose he felt that it was unjust for you to be cut off that way. You might have reasons for not coming back, he told your father, that he didn't know about."

"I had—I had," murmured Mr. Judd, though he did not stop the narrative to relate what they were.

"Of course Dr. Dabney and I had used the same arguments, but it was reserved for McLain to make him see it. It was not flattering to our powers of persuasion but I was glad he accomplished what we couldn't. Well—the result of it was that you father made a new will—in your favour. If he has told you about it himself that is no secret. I doubt if he ever told McLain he had done it."

They sat a few moments without words. Then Dr. Llewellyn continued:

"There is another thing you owe McLain, Calvin. I believe that under God he saved your father's life last winter. Didn't he write to you about it?"

"We don't keep up much of a correspondence," said Mr. Judd, with some embarrassment. "We've sort of got out of the way of writing, you know."

"I see. But it would be a good thing to get into it again, Calvin. He won't be here long."

He related the story of the Colonel's attack.

"If McLain hadn't happened over there that night, and stayed there, and worked with him as he did—if he hadn't done a son's part, Calvin,—your father wouldn't have been here to-day. There are some things you can fool with, but pneumonia isn't one of them. . . . Yes, he has been very kind and attentive to your father this winter since he has been so shut in; goes over often, the Colonel tells me, to play chess with him and talk politics. You know your father delights in politics even yet. I think he would have had a lonely winter but for McLain. I have felt very glad, Calvin,"—deliberately and firmly—"that since it was impossible for you to be here, your father has had a near neighbour who is so mindful of the obligations which, as I see it, rest upon us all to minister to the aged and solitary."

Dr. Llewellyn was taking considerable satisfaction in thus doing justice to his young friend.

"I appreciate it, William. I do indeed!" Mr. Judd may have been appreciative but he certainly was not happy. He was getting all—and more than all—that he had come for. The direction of this conversation had gone entirely out of his hands.

"You asked me a while ago, Calvin, if I shared the popular feeling about McLain. I don't remember that anybody has ever given me his specific opinion of him. But I can tell you this: he will be a useful member of society wherever he is—in this community or any other—for he has one possession that will make him so. . . . What is that possession? The divine gift of constructive sympathy—if you know what that is."

"I don't know that I do—exactly."

"Sympathy," said Dr. Llewellyn, swinging back comfortably in his office chair—he was in a talkative mood and felt the inspiration of an attentive listener, "has various manifestations and not a few mawkish counterfeits.

"I was assistant physician once at the Insane Asylum up here at Putney," he broke off to say, "and the wife of the Superintendent was the matron. A cultivated woman she was, whose cheery laugh was worth more than her husband's physic for sick souls and disordered brains, I do verily believe. I was talking one day while I was there with a lady from the outside about institutional life, particularly life among the insane.

"'Oh,' she said, with a gesture of repulsion, 'I never could do anything like that. I am too sympathetic!'

"Wel-l,—I thought of this queenly woman—the matron—making her daily monotonous rounds with her cheery smile for all, a bunch of flowers for this one, a book for that, a piece of embroidery or maybe a ball of carpet-rags for those who were beginning to reach out for work;—telling a funny story to one, and laying a soft hand on the brow of another who was not ready for the story;—taking this one to walk, and a weaker one to ride, and treating a convalescent to a visit with her in her own apartment;—giving of herself and her own vitality—constantly, unstintedly—that was what it was;—I say I thought of all this, and how like a ray of sunlight she was to those darkened lives, and I said to the soft-hearted lady at my side:

"'It's a good thing everybody isn't as sympathetic as you are.'

"No,—what the world needs to-day, and has always needed, is sympathy; but it must be of the right kind. . . . Life is hard, Calvin. You have found that out in your business if you haven't from personal experience. I certainly have in mine."

"Yes," said Mr. Judd, "it's hard. At times, and in places, it's *almighty* hard!"

"And it is going to keep on being hard. So long as sin and disease and death are in the world there will be sorrow; and those three things are not going to be eliminated right away. You may shut your eyes to them

for a time—but you can't for all time. Even the ostrich with his head buried in the sand is liable to have a knock-down blow some day! The world is getting better—if you don't believe it read English history, or any other history—but there is quite a little step to the millennium yet! Now what men need is not to have their sorrows taken away—you can't do that—but to have heart put into them, and strength, to meet their sorrows. True sympathy does that; and I recognize but two kinds,—constructive and destructive."

"*Destructive* sympathy?"

"Yes, sir. The blood-letting, nerve-tapping variety that arouses only self-pity (than which there is nothing more deadening in this world) and leaves the recipient limp and effortless. I always try to shut out that kind from my sick rooms. Then there is the divine kind which without belittling misfortune—some misfortunes can't be belittled—reaches out and gives a man a grasp that puts strength into his arm and resolution into his soul; that clears the cobwebs away from his brain so that he sees things as they are—that his trouble is only one of many,—that other men as well as he have borne sorrow, and that the main thing is to bear it worthily—and press on!

"Well,—some men and some women, but not all, have the gift of this kind of sympathy. McLain has it to a marked degree. Where he gets it I don't know. You don't often find it in man or woman who has not drunk deep of personal sorrow."

Calvin Judd was listening to all this with intense interest. He knew where McLain got it.

"There is something strange about that kind of sympathy. It teaches people exactly what to do. Take the case of this crippled boy of Drusilla Debo's. That boy was in a bad way when McLain got hold of him. He was bitter and morose and hopeless—bound down. He had a warped soul in a misshapen body. He had been

knocked around and baited and bullied until he hated the whole world. When a man feels that way the world had better look out for him! His infirmity cut him off from companions, and he had literally no resources. His mother couldn't help him, for she was as bitter as he was, and then she couldn't have him with her. Well, McLain took him in hand. He told me himself that the first help he gave the boy was to say after some sullen speech, 'Yes, Sandy, you are a dwarf and you always will be! Now what are you going to do about it?'

"He said the boy fairly raged to think that he too should taunt him. Then McLain went on to say, 'But you don't have to have a dwarfed mind or a shrivelled up soul; they can be as big as anybody's if you will only let them grow.' When that had soaked in and the boy felt the need of help he gave it to him. He taught him to read. Sandy could spell out a page in the reader, but McLain taught him how to read for the meaning. Then he got him the *Youth's Companion* and a few boys' books—and he opened up a world to him. He unsealed his eyes to Nature and taught him how to search for her secrets,—to find pleasure in live things and green things and all that. Well! That boy is independent of companions now. He has them in books and the world around him.

"Then McLain puts mother and son together—and with all that happiness the boy has developed and softened until you wouldn't know him for the same soul. His body, unfortunately, couldn't be changed. . . . And his mother! Well, she would walk over hot ploughshares for McLain."

Calvin Judd tapped his foot meditatively.

"I don't know what I should have done with that Alexander case if he hadn't been here to help me out. He used to keep Tom over with him when his drinking fits were on and would work over and do for him as

tenderly as a woman, and then when he was sobered off he would talk to him like a Dutch uncle. Tom told me about it. He said when he came to pay me, 'If I hold out, it won't be your practice nor Uncle Dabney's preaching. It will be McLain.'"

"He probably did that for love of Jean Dabney," put in Mr. Judd.

"He did it for love of God and humanity—that's what he did it for! He was not going over to Dr. Dabney's at all at that time, they tell me. It is my impression that Jean had refused him."

Mr. Judd considered this in silence.

"Then there was your father's case. I guess he didn't undertake that for love of Jean Dabney! Oh, there *is* such a thing as disinterested kindness in this world, Calvin, and I am going to put an illustration of it before you right now. And I shall be perfectly frank about it too."

Mr. Judd wondered if Dr. Llewellyn imagined he had not been frank thus far.

"When McLain came here your father was dying of inanition. He was greatly broken by Luther's death and was unspeakably lonely. The emptiness of his life was enough to make one weep. He was an old man who had outlived his usefulness, he said, and the pathetic part of it was that it was true. He was simply waiting for the end—and the end didn't come. Well, about this time McLain came into his life. I took him over there myself. He went to ask the Colonel's advice about buying the Bascom place. It ended in his asking freely for advice, which was as freely given. Calvin, that old man's joy to find that he was still of use to somebody, that his opinions were yet of value, would have touched a stone. We had all sympathized with him and taken away from him all the burdens we could; but McLain was the only one who had spiritual insight enough to see that what he needed to keep the springs of life from

drying up was to give, *give* of his mental stores and keep them in circulation. Everything he didn't know about he asked your father; he took him over there day after day; they planned things; they consulted together as two young fellows might; while perfectly respectful McLain treated him like a companion, poking fun at him now and then, and arguing with him often. Well, the old gentleman liked it. It did him good."

"He told me himself the other day that he felt ten years younger than he did a year ago," said Mr. Judd, in wonder.

"I don't doubt it. And it is McLain that's done it! Calvin, the man or woman that keeps us up to the best that is in us, is the one that does us good. . . . Now this is what I mean by constructive sympathy. We can't all have it, but we can take off our hats to the man that has."

Mr. Judd drummed on the table thoughtfully.

"You said a moment ago that McLain seemed to you to be a man upon whom trouble had done its work, or something of that kind. You think the work is done, do you?"

"Not finished—no. Have you forgotten the days when Dr. Dabney taught us that 'Sanctification is a *work*'—not an *act*, as we wanted to call it? Say, Calvin," he broke off, whimsically, "what is the chief end of man?"

"'Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever,'" declared Mr. Judd, promptly, and they went off in a roar of laughter.

"How long since you've thought of it, Cal?"

"Forty years if it's a day, Billy! Don't that old catechism stick?"

They went off then into talk about the days of their youth, and the "boys" and the "girls."

When Calvin Judd rode home from Putney it was with the curious feeling that he and the man he had gone

there to enquire about had somehow changed places. The more he talked with McLain's neighbours the more clearly did he perceive that McLain's roots had in one year gone down deeper into this community than his ever had done, or ever would have done. . . . Strange, wasn't it? . . . And why should such a man be uprooted?

When Mr. Judd went over to Dr. Dabney's for a farewell call he found McLain on the porch with Jean. She took him into the house after a few minutes of light talk, for he had come over to see the doctor, he said.

"When do you go?"

"To-morrow, if I get through satisfactorily with some business I have to attend to. I thought I would run over for a few words to-night. Did you walk over, Mr. McLain? I'll drive you home if you'd like, if it will not hurry you. I'll be out in a few minutes."

McLain understood the polite invitation as a command.

"Any time," he said, finding his lips dry and hard to manage. "I shall be glad to ride with you."

If he held Jean Dabney's hand at parting longer than usual and with a tighter grip—and he did—it was without knowing it. And if there be one thing for which we should give fervent and unfeigned thanks it is that the Creator did not see fit to place in every breast a window that would reveal all that is hidden there.

The two men drove down the road in utter silence. When at last it was broken it was with some trivial question about the journey. We do strange things sometimes when great issues are at stake.

At last McLain said, huskily:

"Well? Tell me!"

The ex-sheriff surveyed the man as though he were a specimen impaled upon the point of his needle and held up for inspection.

"I don't know that I can tell you in a word. But I will say this much, McLain. You have played the man with fate against you. It is a hard thing to do that, do you know it?"

The man's lips straightened grimly. "I ought to by this time."

"I've had a long talk with Dr. Llewellyn—a searching talk"—he did not say who it was that had been searched—"and I've talked with Dr. Dabney and Mr. Cartwright and John Bascom and others. I have done it guardedly, but I've done it thoroughly. They all give you a clean bill of health, McLain. And my father——! Oh, well,—you've been the son, and I've been the stranger. Nobody needs to rub that in the way William Llewellyn did. I am not unmindful of my sins of omission now if I have been all these years. . . . And I don't know that I have any call to constitute myself your judge."

McLain was breathing hard. To what did this all tend?

"I put a question to Dr. Dabney yesterday that involved your case, and——"

The man turned white. "Judd! you promised me——"

"Yes, I promised you that I wouldn't give it away, and I didn't. I am a man of my word if I *am* an indifferent son! . . . I told him of a case I knew of out West—a man who had got into pretty serious trouble and run away from it;—that I knew of his whereabouts;—found out by accident years afterwards when he had gone to a new place and was trying to lead a new life;—that I honestly believed he was a repentant man and would make a thoroughly good member of society;—*but*—that I knew this thing, and what ought I to do?"

"Well?" The voice was tense. It was easy to see that upon the answer would hang his future.

"He told me to keep my hands off,—not just in those words, of course, but he advised me that a truly repentant

man should be left in the hands of the Almighty. 'He will find him, Calvin,' he said, 'and deal with him.' . . . Well, the old doctor knows more about such things than I do, and I'm going to take his advice."

"Judd!"

"Yes, sir; I am going to keep my hands off. I have made up my mind definitely to that and you may depend on it. If you persist in this insane determination to tell the girl everything, it will result in more anguish to these people I am trying to protect than if I hold my tongue. As I look at it now there is not one chance in five hundred that they will ever find out about it; but if you tell it all and throw yourself on the girl's sympathy (as you are in a mood to do now)——"

"I certainly shall do it if you force me!"

"——there are just about five hundred chances to one that she will marry you in spite of it. You never can tell what a woman is going to do when her affections are involved except that you may feel pretty sure she will do some fool thing! I don't know but I will be serving my old friends best by keeping this confounded past of yours locked in my breast."

The man was evidently arguing the matter with himself.

"So go ahead! And I give you my word of honour that I will keep out of it. . . . But, boy!" he said, impressively, while McLain was wringing his hand and trying to convey his gratitude, "you'll not get away from it! Mark my words! *At some time or another the sins of our youth come back to plague us!* It is as the old doctor says—the Almighty has His own way of settling with us."

But McLain was not to be daunted now.

"Only keep your hands off, Judd," he said, defiantly, "and I'll risk the Almighty!"

XIX

SMOOTH SAILING

IT was in the old summer house in the midst of the tangled garden that he told his love—a fitting place with its buds of hope and its thorns.

From the country station, where he had said good-bye to Calvin Judd and waved him a fervent "God speed," he had gone straight to Jean. Would she go over to The Oaks with him? There was something he wanted to consult her about.

Yes, Jean would go, and they would take the ravine road. The time they went for the dogwood, she reminded him, they didn't go far enough to see much, but she had been there once this spring when there was that enchanting grey-green in the tree-tops with occasionally the pink of the redbuds, and it was heavenly!

"Yes," he said. "I saw you. You looked as if you thought it was heavenly!"

"You saw me?"

"Yes; saw you both."

"Now, who was with me?" she challenged.

"Gresham. And you had on a hat with a white wing or something on it that I took for a bird when it first fluttered into view."

"Well, I *did*—have on that hat," she said, wonderingly. "Where were you?"

"Up on a bank behind a tree."

"What were you doing?"

"Watching you and wishing Gresham was where he belonged."

"You absurd boy!" she said, blushing. "Will you never grow up?"

They did not talk much after they reached the ravine, and that little was but the fragmentary exclamations of two nature lovers. The trees all had their tale to tell of resurrection. To the man walking through them they were the harbingers of hope. Why should not human life also be revivified? It was nature's way.

The highway in front of McLain's place crossed the ravine by means of a substantial bridge, the county's pride. They clambered up the bank just before they reached it, and crossing the road were in front of the oaks that gave the new name to the old place. They were magnificent trunks, but bare yet, waiting as true aristocrats should for all the lesser gentry to arrive before they made their triumphal entry upon the scene.

Well back among them, with the tangled, overgrown flower garden at its right, was the house. All else, Jean noticed, was in repair except these two; new fences were in evidence; new gates swung where old ones sagged last year; red barns glowed in the distance;—but the house remained as it had been—unpainted and forbidding.

"Why don't you do something to this house?" Jean demanded, as they walked slowly toward it. "What are you waiting for?"

He smiled enigmatically. "To see if it is worth while."

"Of course it is worth while. Father says it is one of the best built houses in the county. But it certainly needs overhauling."

"Suppose I make you my architect. Come, now! How would you overhaul it?"

There was an old weather-beaten rustic seat on the lawn. They sat down upon it, facing the house, which really had a certain dignity of its own because of its massive plainness, and planned how it should be thus—and thus—and thus. And as she talked of spacious porticoes and white columns with the old "Queen of the

Prairie" and the "Baltimore Belle" climbing about them; of the old summer house restored and the garden blossoming again, he saw it all—and more,—far more—a sweet-faced woman in the open door to welcome him, and on the lawn *his* children playing.

Upon this pleasant picture Mrs. Debo obtruded, bearing in her hands a tray upon which were a plate of hot cookies, two glasses, and a pitcher of creamy milk.

"I feel as if I ought to ask a blessing as your father does," said McLain, setting the tray down between them.

"You irreverent creature!"

"I assure you I never felt less irreverence in my life; nor more thankfulness. This is the first time you have broken bread at The Oaks."

"It's cookies," corrected Mrs. Debo. "I'll give you some to take home with you, Jean, seein' as you like 'em."

When the feast was over they strolled about the place and finally to the flower garden, in the centre of which was the old summer house that Major Bascom had built for his bride so many years ago. Jean noticed that everything was unchanged. Not a brier had been cut out; not a shovelful of gravel put in.

"Why don't you fix up this garden, sir? Didn't I tell you last summer how to do it?"

He smiled. "I am waiting to see if it is worth while."

It was genuine astonishment on her face this time. "How can you tell whether it is worth while until you try?"

His eyes narrowed. "That's true. How *can* one tell until he has tried? One must always risk something, I suppose. It is time to give up when he has failed, isn't it?"

"You won't fail if you do with it as you ought."

"You can't always do as you ought. Sometimes you do as you want to—or have to."

"I don't know what you are talking about," she said; "but I do know that these old rose bushes ought to come up,—root and branch. They are blush roses."

"Is that a crime?"

"It is in a garden. What's the use spending time cultivating things that are not worth while after you've made them grow? With a world so full of beautiful things I should dig out and replant until I had what I wanted."

"I'll do it!"

She glanced up, startled by the intensity of his tone, but he was looking at the rose bush.

"Go get your pruning shears," she said, "and I will show you how to trim these others. This is just the right time."

"No, it isn't. It is just the wrong time. I don't want to slice rose bushes. I want to talk to you. Come on over here to the summer house, won't you?"

She followed him, wondering at his mood. He scarcely understood it himself. When he brought her over here what he had set himself to do seemed easy and feasible—with Judd out of the way. He was full of courage, full of resolution. He had turned his back on the past; it was only the present and the future with which he would deal from this time on. To youth there is no day of reckoning.

This was as he had felt. Now for some inexplicable reason the past was closing in on him again. He could not shake it off. It benumbed his will and darkened his understanding. Life suddenly stood out before him like this garden,—overgrown with noxious things—hedged about with thorns—a network that would tangle his feet and trip him some day—and *trip her with him.* He ought not to do it! He knew he ought not to do it—but——

He stood before her then and threw out his arms in a passionate gesture that took in the garden and all else.

"It's all a tangle!" he cried, helplessly. "I can't do it alone! . . . Jean, will you help me?"

She comprehended dimly, almost fearfully, that this was more than the garden; but whatever it was, he needed her, and because of her great love she was ready to give of her woman's strength, her woman's tenderness, to meet that need.

"I'll try," she said, simply; and he caught her to his breast. In the bliss of that moment, with her true heart beating close to his, it all seemed easy again.

When they had talked a while the sweet nothings that are only for lovers' ears, she said, hesitatingly:

"Mr. McLain——"

"Archer," he corrected.

"Archer, then. I have called you that a long time in my thoughts. It ought not to be hard. . . . There is one thing I want to ask you."

"Yes, dear."

His arm tightened around her and his hands grew cold. It was coming. This was the beginning of the things that must be evaded. "What is it?"

"Was—was it this you were trying to say that other night—in the vestibule?"

"Yes; this—and more."

"I felt almost sure then it was; and yet——"

"Yet what, dearest?"

"I could not understand why—if——"

"Why if I loved you I waited so long before telling you?"

"Yes; that's what I mean."

Was it becoming his habit to wait long? Certainly he found no prompt words now. . . . What could he say? . . . This was a fair question she was asking him. If all were to be open between them it must have an honest answer. . . . But what?

"Jean," he said at length, putting his finger tips under

her chin and lifting her troubled face so that he could look into it, "there was a reason why I could not speak then—a reason that I cannot tell you even now—may never be able to tell you, perhaps. Do you think you love me well enough to trust me without knowing that?"

"It was not that you grew doubtful of your own feelings after that night?"

"No!" he said, so vehemently that she could not doubt him. "No—never!"

"Then I trust you. You need never tell me unless you want to tell. I trust you, Archer—trust you absolutely."

His soul went down on bended knees before her and his Maker pleading for forgiveness, but he drew her to him and was silent.

"Well, land o' mercy!" ejaculated Mrs. Debo an hour later as she saw the two disappearing in the path that led to the ravine. "If them two loonies ain't gone off and forgot the cookies! And me out yonder makin' up a fresh batch a-purpose, when I might a-been out in the garden entertainin' 'em! *Well!*"

XX

RECONSTRUCTION

"Sweet is the breath of the lilac,
And the young grass bending with dew,
And the earth has a note
Of a song in the throat
Of a bird
Because of you."

WAS there ever such a May as that?

Perhaps for Miss Lavinia in the days of long ago when young Henry Manson wooed her under the apple blossoms; possibly for dear old Dr. Dabney when he brought sweet Mary Charlton to his country home and they made honeymoon love under their own vine and fig tree. But for Jean and Archer McLain—never!

They were busy days too, filled to the brim with the satisfying joys of the commonplace. There were endless intimate consultations in earnest now about the house and the flower garden.

Archer McLain scandalized his man, Elijah Coyt II, by incontinently taking him from the field to make flower beds and uproot blush roses. So insane a proceeding did this appear, so opposed to all traditions of a community where corn-planting gives way to nothing save a funeral procession, that Elijah II reported it straightway to Elijah I, and Elijah I conceived it his Christian duty to remonstrate.

"Ah-h, Lige!" answered McLain, going on with his pruning and smiling his inscrutable smile, "one can always purchase corn; that costs nothing but money.

But the gold of Ophir couldn't buy the things I am planting in this garden."

"And as fur as I could see," declared Mr. Coyt, in relating the story of his unselfish effort, "it warn't a thing but pinks and pinies, and sech like. . . . I always 'lowed he'd peter out at farmin'. *Flower beds in corn-plantin' time! Shucks!*"

The flower garden was finished at last, waiting for the spring's quickening. McLain had felt a savage satisfaction in uprooting the briers and brambles that marred its visage. And when it was ready for her inspection, and hand in hand they walked its gravelled paths, it seemed to the man that the first page of reconstruction was without a flaw, and to the woman that it was Eden.

The garden had been McLain's first care because Jean, from her greater knowledge, had assured him that this could not wait; but it was not long before the second page was progressing under the vigorous hand of the master of The Oaks. Hammer and saw woke the echoes of the ravine, and the astonished squirrels chattered in the old oaks and leaped from branch to branch and tree to tree in their haste to tell the news to all the other denizens of this Druids' temple. The oaks—a slow-moving, dignified folk—could hardly keep pace with these upstart carpenters and masons and painter men. They had to put on all force of sap and rootlet—with the sun to help—to keep in the background the stately mansion these hirelings were bringing into being. It was a busy time for all—nature's artisans who worked for love no less than those who worked for gold.

Even Goose Creek heard rumours of the goings-on at the old Bascom place and sent envoys to observe and report.

"Such doin's!" retailed Mrs. Freno. "Money's nothin' to *him*. Why, he's puttin' closets in every bedroom! And the house had one when he bought it—that one under the stairs, you know, where Mrs. Bas-

com kep' her preserves—but oh, no! that warn't enough for him! Druse says *he* says he don't know what twenty-foot bedrooms are for if it ain't to take closets off of; so he's puttin' up partitions where they ain't, and takin' 'em down where they air, till you would hardly know the old place. Druse says he 'lows to get in all the improvements it'll take."

"He's plumb reckless," responded Mrs. Ham, "spendin' money that-a-way! Why, he's takin' up good solid floorin' jes' to put down little teensy planks—*so* wide,"—and Mrs. Ham measured off a space incredibly small to women who had reared their offspring with more or less success on the "puncheon" floors of the first settlers.

"But he'll git to the end of his pile before long, I reckon, ef he ain't already got there. Druse says he ain't goin' to git any carpets—he'll have to do with jest rugs. I expect she's plattin' them rugs now—but she's so close-mouthed!"

"No carpets!" protested Mrs. Sam Gee. "Why, I 'lowed he'd have Brussels!"

They came very close to each other in the building of that home, Jean Dabney and her lover, for all the details were referred to the girl. "The fittings of a house are more to a woman than to a man," McLain told her. "They make a home for her, as her presence makes it for him. Have it all as you will, my bonnie Jean,—only give me yourself."

June roses were budding when it was done at last, and when the "Queen of the Prairie" and the "Baltimore Belle" had been trained around the new pillars it was—well, it was a sweet, beautiful body for the indwelling of the soul of a home. As they stood under the roses and looked out upon their oaks they did not envy even the great Mr. Rockefeller.

These were happy, busy days at The Manse too. It

was to be a June wedding, and June—even the last of it—would be coming all too swiftly for the trousseau and the linen chest which was Miss Lavinia's especial charge.

Dear Miss Lavinia was in a flutter of sentimental delight these days. Long months ago, before either of the principals had been aware of the trend of their feelings, Miss Lavinia had had a vision, and the visible, material outcome of the vision was a linen chest,—surreptitiously begun, hopefully added to, sorrowfully laid aside after Calvin Judd's first visit, but returned to with renewed zeal following his second. To Miss Lavinia a bride's linen was her dowry; and the sentiment that had been denied utterance in her own blighted romance blossomed out in napery, hemmed and initialed and laid away in sweet lavender for Jean.

Through the bustle of those spring days Dr. Dabney pursued the even tenor of his way,—a little more quiet, a trifle tenderer of the girl, perhaps, and inclined to retire into his study away from the pervading spirit of cheerful activity. He told himself frequently that it was the way of Nature; he would not have it otherwise; it was very gratifying that she would be so near him; a cause of thankfulness that she had chosen wisely.

He had had in his study one interview with the young man which had sent McLain from that gentle presence white and nerveless; but that one interview is perhaps always a trying one to both parties. After it, it was always "Archer, my boy," with a pride and tenderness that somehow made one think of the son that was not—that had never been except in dreams—but whose incarnation was to come in this stalwart young man. After that interview McLain came and went upon the familiar footing of a son of the house.

And the last of June was near.

Unknown to himself the successful transformation that had taken place in the old Bascom place had added

to the esteem in which McLain was held in the community. It was held to be proof positive, for one thing, that he had cast in his lot with them permanently (there had always been doubters as to this); besides which it was admitted that he had added something to the neighbourhood assets of which they might all be proud. He came to be spoken of as a rising young man, who spent money freely—too freely some of the old farmers thought—but always got a return for it. And it was only natural, since human nature is what it is, that his popularity was enhanced by the feeling which was gradually getting around that with all his free-handedness he never allowed himself to be imposed upon.

"He's nobody's fool, I can tell you," said one who had endeavoured to make him his. "He looks easy, but——"

The hiatus told more than words.

"No," said another, "that there smile of his is encouragin', but it don't always mean he's givin' in."

"Ever try to sell him a horse?" asked Job Barclay. It was down at Henyon's they were talking. Job was a prospective candidate for County Collector and was already visiting the country stores. He was fond of a joke, even when it was on himself, which proves that his love was genuine. He was known as a shrewd dealer.

"No. Did you?"

"Ye-eh." The company waited. "You see I heard he was needing horses soon after he came here and I knew I was needing cash, and when it come to me in a roundabout way that he liked the looks of my mare Jule I made up my mind I'd try to sell her to him."

"That mare you been ridin' round here for the last forty years, Job?"

"Same one. I bought her from Colonel Judd ten years ago, and she was—some years old then. . . . Well, I took Jule and combed and curried her till she didn't know herself from one of her own colts. Oh,

I did a good job! I rubbed her down and slicked her up and plaited her mane and tail to make 'em wave, for thinks I, 'A youngster like him will be all for looks,' and Jule *is* a fine-lookin' animal, you'll have to admit that . . . yes, for her age, of course. And by George! when I got her over there she stepped around as young and frisky as if she knew her part and was ready to act it! I put a fancy price on her——"

"How much, Job?"

"Never mind how much! It was good and plenty—I won't deny that—for I knew he had money and I didn't, and I had experience and he didn't—and I thought it was nothin' more than neighbourly to trade. He seemed pleased with her until I mentioned my price.

"'Ain't that a pretty good figure for an animal of her age?' he says, opening her mouth as cool as if he hadn't done another thing all his life but look at horses' teeth. 'How old did you say she is?'

"'Oh, she's not a right young mare,' I says. 'I ain't sellin' her for a filly. She's seasoned,' I says. 'You'll not have to break her,'—I could hear him chuckle—'but she's a good mare and I'm a-holdin' her for a good price.'"

"Well?" said one of the crowd as he stopped.

"Well, sir, I'm still a-holdin' her! I didn't care anything about his lookin' in her mouth. It kinder tickled me. I thought he was just tryin' to show off.

"'How old do you make her?' I says.

"'About twenty—perhaps not quite so much,' he says.

"Well, gentlemen, you could have knocked me down with a feather! That mare was nineteen *past*. He went over her exterior then and picked out her weak spots as neat as a horse doctor diagnosin' a case. When he got to her interior I give it up. The next time I set out to sell a 'seasoned' horse I'm goin' to tackle some of you old moss-backs."

That story was appreciated. It got around and added

to McLain's reputation as a shrewd fellow. A man that could beat Job Barclay at his own game knew a few things.

It got to McLain at last, and nobody appreciated it more than he, for nobody knew the true inwardness of it as he did. Colonel Judd had told him the mare's age and her weak points a few days before Mr. Barclay brought her over. McLain knew no more about a horse's teeth than about the grinders of the mastodon.

The dominant party in the county of which Tinkling Spring was a part was in bad shape that year. Upon most of the county offices it was united, but there was a fight on over the Representative that threatened to result in the overthrow of the party. Jeff Trailes was one of the would-be candidates, and Jeff was not popular. In fact, he was so unpopular that his own party could be depended upon to knife him at the polls. There were some ugly stories about Trailes's record away back. Moses Tyler, the other aspirant, was equally obnoxious to many who declared openly they would throw the election to a Republican before they would be represented by a "shote" like Mose Tyler—an ignoramus who talked in public about the "island of Alaska" and the "Philiponies." The party of Lincoln was a negligible quantity in that county in ordinary years, but one could never count upon anything when there was a split like this.

"What we want," said Colonel Judd, tersely, to John Bascom and Mr. Cartwright who had come in to talk over the situation with him, "is a dark horse."

The Colonel, even in his declining years, was an astute politician.

"You mean——"

"I mean a man that is out of this fight entirely—one that each faction will support for the sake of defeating the other. As I see it that's our only show."

"But where would we get such a man?" asked Mr.

Cartwright. "Pretty much everybody is lined up on one side or the other."

And in the casting about that ensued there did seem to be a decided lack of legislative timber.

"I'll tell you a man that could do it if he would," said John Bascom, who had been doing more thinking than talking. "He's not so very well known——"

"We don't want one that's too well known," interrupted the Colonel. "That's one trouble with Trailes."

"Who is your man?" demanded Mr. Cartwright.

"Young McLain."

The two men sat in thought.

"H-m!" said Mr. Cartwright at last. "Do you know, Colonel, I don't think that would be a bad choice?"

"No, sir! No, sir! . . . No, sir, it would not." There was strengthening conviction in the Colonel's voice. "He could do it, sure as shooting! But would he want it?"

"Why shouldn't he? He is young and ambitious; and coming to him unsought, as this would——"

"Have you had any talk with him about it?"

"Not a word."

"How did you happen to think of him?" asked Colonel Judd.

"Well, I've thought a good many times when we have been riding around the country together and I was listening to his talk that I would like to be represented by a clean, clear-headed young man like him. But I can't say I ever thought of him as a possibility at this time until—why, Colonel, it was Calvin that first put that notion in my head."

"Calvin!"

"Yes, sir. Calvin suggested to me when he was here last that he wondered we didn't send McLain to the Legislature."

"H-m!" breathed the Colonel. "I am surprised at that." It was evident that he was also pleased.

"Yes, sir, that's what he told me. I didn't think much about it until you began talking about a dark horse—a man the people knew something about, but not too much. It occurred to me that McLain was in exactly that position. We don't know much about him, but what we do know is very much to his credit. I can't think of a thing that can be brought up against him. He has made a lot of acquaintances in this county and not an enemy. I never saw such a fellow for making friends." And again the story of their business trips was recounted.

"He's a good mixer," agreed Mr. Cartwright.

"Then," pursued Mr. Bascom, "it isn't as if the man was transient here. He's bought his place and put a lot of improvements on it. He is known as a man of means and standing. Of course he hasn't lived here long, but——"

"But his interests are all identified with ours," finished Mr. Cartwright.

"That's it! He's a farmer, McLain is, just like the rest of us. And he would have the farmers' interests at heart. *You* know they don't all have."

"His connection with the Dabneys would help," said Colonel Judd, thoughtfully. "As Dr. Dabney's son-in-law he will have some claim to recognition."

"He won't need it," Mr. Bascom predicted. "He can stand on his own merits, that man can."

"We wouldn't feel ashamed of him anyway," chuckled the Colonel. "You wouldn't hear him descanting on the 'Philiponies,' and the 'island of Alaska.'"

"You wouldn't hear Mose Tyler, for that matter," rejoined Mr. Cartwright, drily. "They say Mose won't so much as mention a horse or a mule for fear of turning the conversation toward *ponies.*"

"Well, what do you think, Colonel?" asked Mr. Bascom, after further talk. "Shall we see McLain and put

it up to him—that is, sound him on the subject and see how he feels about it?"

"I should. And if he is inclined to balk send him over to me. But he'll know his own mind. I think I would speak to Major Davidson and perhaps Adoniram Freno about it first. Adoniram will know about the people down in his section."

"Well," said Mr. Bascom, rising, "I can't give up another day to this, Mr. Cartwright. Suppose we go over and see Major Davidson now, and if he thinks favourably of it we will get him——"

"And Adoniram. I should certainly talk with Adoniram. Don't forget that the votes of Goose Creek count for as much as yours; and Adoniram swings a good many of them in the primaries. Of course," the Colonel added with a chuckle, "if McLain is nominated, Drusilla will see that Goose Creek does its duty in November!"

XXI

THE LURE OF POLITICS

ARCHER McLAIN was enjoying the evening hush and the smell of the freshly cut grass on his lawn when Mr. Bascom, Mr. Cartwright, and Major Davidson appeared on the driveway. He took it to be a neighbourly call and rose to do the honours, wondering a little how they happened to be in company. He was not long left in ignorance.

When their business was made known he went white. His tongue refused its office. It seemed incredible to him that they should be in earnest, and yet he could not think of these serious-minded farmers in connection with a practical joke. They soon left him in no doubt of their sincerity.

"You are unprepared for this, of course," said Mr. Cartwright, after McLain had stammered out his surprise, "and for my part I would rather you would be. This is a case of the office seeking the man, Mr. McLain. It does not often happen in these days, if it ever did."

They went into the situation in detail as they had done at Colonel Judd's.

"I understand it, gentlemen," McLain said, at last, "and I thank you for your thought of me in this connection. I should be glad and proud to serve you,"—he stopped—"but I am not the man for the place."

"You must allow your friends to be the judge of that, Mr. McLain," suggested Major Davidson, who had spoken but little. "You are over-modest."

"Why aren't you the man for the place?" demanded

John Bascom. "I have been telling them a different story from that. I say you are *just* the man for the place."

"I certainly appreciate that, Mr. Bascom." McLain spoke with deep feeling. He had a profound respect for John Bascom and his endorsement was no light thing to him. "But—I think I am right about this. I have been among you too short a time for you to honour me thus. I—I am not well enough known. At a later time perhaps——"

"My young friend," said Major Davidson, impressively, "the time for a man to serve his country is when his country needs him. When you are ready, that time may be past. This is a crisis in our county politics."

"If it is votes you are thinking about," supplemented Mr. Bascom, who, being a prospective candidate himself, knew that this phase of the subject was a burning one, "I will say this: you have made a lot of friends in this county in the year you've been here, Mr. McLain—one way and another. You would get help where you would least expect it. They would stand by you to a man down on Goose Creek, Mr. Freno tells me, some of them that have never so much as seen you."

"On Goose Creek!" said McLain, amazed. "Why should they stand by me on Goose Creek?"

"Because of your generous dealings with Drusilla Debo and that crippled boy of hers. You know Drusilla was from down that way, and she goes back occasionally now! They are clannish down on the Creek—they don't forget either friend or foe. I believe you could make it, McLain."

"And we need more men of your kind—incorruptible men—in the Legislature," Mr. Cartwright said. "We elect a United States Senator this session. We want men to whom money doesn't offer a temptation."

"I should have one qualification then," said McLain, grimly.

"You have a good many other qualifications," they assured him, and proceeded to set them forth.

At first, remembering the limelight, what they proposed seemed to the man a monstrous impossibility, but a thought long dwelled upon oft changes its aspect. The longer they urged him the more attractive did this proposition become in his eyes and the less hazardous. Besides, when did not a spice of danger quicken the blood of a young man?

They were evidently getting together, for according to a well-known law of human nature, the more he demurred the more eager did they become (realizing that his reluctance was unfeigned) to have him run. It was true that they had not known him long, Mr. Cartwright agreed, when he put this again and again before them, but his life among them spoke for itself.

"And a man of your age," said Major Davidson, who was well down the slope, "hasn't had time for a political *past*. It's all future with you young fellows." He sighed unconsciously, feeling the burden of years.

"Of course you understand," Mr. Bascom explained, "this is only preliminary. We simply want to find out to-night if you will consider it. Otherwise it wouldn't be worth while to organize for you. But you will?"

"I couldn't answer that definitely to-night, Mr. Bascom. I really couldn't. I will say this much—that I feel strongly drawn toward it, but I should have to take it under advisement."

"Of course, of course. Perhaps you might like to talk it over with Colonel Judd?"

"I should. And—Dr. Dabney."

"Certainly. That's perfectly right and proper. You'll give us your answer in a few days?"

"I will," said McLain, firmly. And the men rode hopefully away.

When they were gone McLain went back to his former position, but to a new and startling train of thought. The

air was full of the cloying sweet of the locusts in the back-yard; the katydids were starting their evening duets; down in the ravine the tree toads were sending forth their guttural bass;—but he was oblivious to the things of sense.

The man was profoundly moved by what had occurred. It was far more to him than simply entrance into the political arena. That in itself was a small thing—though years ago he had had a strong leaning toward political life. But that his neighbours, among whom he had lived for more than a year, with whom he had had business dealings of various sorts should come to him with this evidence of their confidence seemed proof that he had regained his place in the world. They trusted him! He could have wept as he said the word, from excess of joy that the intangible thing it stood for was his once more. How lightly do we esteem the confidence of our fellow-men until we find it forfeited,—when to the uncalloused soul it straightway becomes the weightiest thing in all the universe! . . . They knew him, and they trusted him. They came to him *because* they trusted him. And by the Eternal!—he said it reverently, looking up as if uttering a vow—their trust should never be betrayed!

At first it was the joy of knowing he was trusted that transcended everything else. He threw back his shoulders as if he were casting off some old man of the sea.

Then his thoughts turned to the proposition they had brought him. It offered to a man of his make-up an alluring temptation. It meant action, responsibility, power; and these were the things, he knew now, that his soul thirsted for. Would he ever have been content to spend his days on this farm? He had told himself he would—that he would ask for nothing more; but at this moment he felt that he had been self-deceived. He had been conscious at times, in the building up of this place, that it was not so much the desire for a good

farm that was driving him on as a fierce longing to *do* something, to make something move.

And after all, here he was only working with physical forces and the brute creation. To be a man among men—to wrestle with the questions of the hour and do battle for the right as one might always find opportunity to do in legislative halls; to throw himself into the world's fight—that was what he wanted! To impress his personality upon the history of his time, of his adopted State, of the Nation, perhaps—for thought leaps all barriers, and he was following the lead of this open door——

Ah! . . . That would be to live!

And why shouldn't he? After all, why shouldn't he? . . . He threw out the question defiantly.

Then a benumbing doubt, a fear that chilled his blood crept over him. The life of a political candidate was in a fierce light! Would his stand it? . . . Dare he take the risk? . . . He gnawed his under lip—a trick he had when in deep thought. Major Davidson had said he was too young for a past—no, that wasn't it—he had said he was too young for a *political* past. . . . Yes . . . that was different. Any kind of a past might be raked up as capital in a campaign. Suppose——

The sentence was never finished, but cold chills ran up and down his spine at the thought of what a campaign search might unearth. . . . No, it wouldn't do! It would be better to give up the whole thing than to risk that! Fortunately, he had not committed himself. He had only to say to Mr. Bascom or one of the others, that he had decided he could not sacrifice his pecuniary interests at this time, just as he was starting, to make the run. Some other time, perhaps. That would settle it in a dignified and still an indefinite way. Then after he had proved himself in this community, when he could point to a record here that would satisfy a political opponent—it would be time enough then to consider

public life. Yes, that would be better. He was too young anyway.

Then perhaps because he was young, having the daring of youth and lacking the caution of years; because it was a thing he wanted and believed he could secure; because of his conviction that he had expiated his sin, whatever it was—he put his fears and doubts and premonitions behind him, and struck his knee with his clenched hand, and cried:

"I will do it! I'll take the chances! Am I to go through my whole life in bondage to one mistake? . . . *No!* by Heaven!"

He had recently put in a telephone so that Jean when she came to her new home should have the privilege of talking to her father and Aunt Lavinia every day. He went to it now and called her up. He would be a little late in coming over to-night. . . . No, nothing wrong. Everything was all right! . . . And Jean at the other end smiled to herself to hear the exultant ring in his voice. . . . He had to see Colonel Judd about something before he came over. That was all. Good-bye.

The interview with Colonel Judd was short but convincing. McLain had determined before going over that he would profess indifference to the proposition in order to bring out the Colonel's real position in the matter. Colonel Judd's opinion was never difficult to obtain. It certainly was not now.

"In my judgment, you would be very foolish to turn down this opportunity," he said, emphatically. "You have a strong liking for politics, and taste and talent usually coincide. You have in a marked degree the ability to influence men. Dr. Llewellyn and I have often talked about it. That's a gift, and it is one that a man ought to turn to account. In the halls of the Legislature it would be worth something to you. Besides that, you are what the country needs—an upright downright rep-

resentative of the people. You wouldn't go to the Legislature to feather your nest. I couldn't say as much of Jeff Trailes. As to the other man—I have never heard Mose Tyler's honesty called in question, but he has no sense—that man! And you never can depend on a fool! . . . There is no question in my mind that you can get this nomination if you want it. And with the nomination your election is secured."

"Your advice, then," said McLain, at length, "is to go in."

"By all means. The time to serve the people is when the people want you."

"On your head be it then, Colonel," said McLain, rising, "on yours and the rest. I'm in the hands of my friends."

"You'll win! I'd stake my farm on it."

Jean was on the porch waiting for him.

"Is Colonel Judd ill? You don't look as if you had had bad news."

"No, he is not ill. It is not that. And I haven't any bad news." He drew her down to the step beside him. "Sit down here by me. I hate those rocking chairs! Do you know it is only six days until we will be sitting on our own steps? Not quite a week!"

"Oh, dreadful! Was that what you wanted to tell me? And did you think I had lost count since this afternoon when you told me the same thing?"

"Did I? Well, you see I'm saying it to myself all my spare time now."

"I haven't any spare time," she declared. "I ought to be doing something this blessed minute. Could you substitute Aunt Lavinia while I write a letter?"

"Not well," he said, tightening his hold upon her.

"Not even father? Father is a much better talker than I am."

"I don't want a talker. I want a listener. I have something to tell you."

"*Really,* have you? What is it?"

"How would you like to spend the next two winters in Jefferson City?" He held her off so that he could see her face.

"Jefferson City! Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean that you may be asked to go there with the next Representative from this county."

"Why, Archer McLain! You are not going to the Legislature!"

"That remains to be seen. I am not elected yet. Don't order your gown for the Governor's ball! In fact, I am not nominated. But——"

"But what?"

"I have been asked to allow my name to go before the primary, and I have come over to ask the gracious permission of the Princess."

He raised her hand to his lips.

"Oh, Archer! wouldn't that be fine! Tell me all about it."

He related the occurrences of the evening in detail,—the proposition brought by the men and their arguments.

"What did you tell them?"

"That I should have to take a few days to consider it. I had to talk it over with you and your father, you know. Your life is bound up with mine now, dearest. It is what shall 'we' do—not 'I,' as it once was. . . . And so you are pleased?"

"Why, I am delighted! And, Archer, it isn't just that I want to spend the winter at the capital, though I should like that too, because I have so many friends in Jefferson City. I should enjoy it, of course,—any girl would—but the thing that delights me most is that you should have been honoured in this way. Don't you feel that it is an honour to have this come to you unsolicited?"

"I certainly do," he said, gravely. "It is an honour that I do not merit."

"You do merit it! It would not have come to you if you didn't. That is why I am so proud of it—and of you!"

The praise and adulation of the woman he loves is very sweet in a man's ears. McLain felt his last doubts dissolving beneath the warm sunshine of her faith.

They talked it over in all its bearings upon their lives. She was so familiar with the capital that she even knew where they would want to board, and perceived instantly that this would necessitate an addition to her trousseau.

"Jean," he said, cautiously, "don't go upon the presumption that it is settled until we know. I don't even know that I am going to run. But I'll tell you what I am going to do."

"What?"

"I am going to let your father decide it."

"Father!" she exclaimed. "Why should father decide it?"

"Wel-l—to tell the truth, I am a little in doubt about the wisdom of it, Jean. I want to do it, but I don't know whether it is the best thing to do or not. And I don't want to make any mistake. I have a sort of superstitious feeling that your father will tell me right. He knows me."

"He will tell you what he thinks is right. You can depend on that."

"I have a feeling that his decision will *be* right. If he advises against it I don't—think—I shall go on with it."

"Let's go and ask him!" she said, jumping to her feet.

"*You* can't go! No, indeed! This decision must be an unbiased one, and your face as it looks now would bias a stone."

"I'll go up with you then and stay outside."

"All right! Come on."

She tiptoed beside him and waited in the hall. "Don't keep me waiting too long," she whispered as he rapped.

"Come in," called the minister.

McLain left the door ajar.

"Ah, it's you, is it, Archer? Where is Jean?"

"She was downstairs a moment ago. I came up to ask your advice about something."

The minister took off his reading glasses and gave attention.

It was not without some inward trepidation that McLain put the case before him, for Jean's enthusiasm had kindled his own. The office of Representative seemed to him a more desirable one than when he came over. Dr. Dabney put in a question here and there and then was silent.

"Why had you any hesitation about accepting?" he asked.

McLain reddened. "I have a feeling that I am not well enough known in the community," he said.

"But if they think you are—it is to represent them, you know—and they are men of good judgment, all three of them. I look upon this as an opportunity for usefulness, and an opportunity is not a thing to be lightly turned away from. Unless you know of some reason why you should not enter this race, I should say—do it."

"There!" cried Jean, throwing the door open and rushing up to him. "I knew he would say it!" She perched herself on her father's chair and threw her arms around his neck. "Oh, daddy, isn't it fine!"

"That settles it," said McLain, quietly, nodding to her.

"And, father, you will come over to see us, won't you, while we are there? . . . Yes, I mean if we go, of *course,* Archer! I know it isn't settled. . . . And, father, we will go over to the Capitol together and hear Archer speak!"

She supposed that Archer's speeches would be the main feature of the next session.

They talked it over at length, and McLain found the last vestige of his doubt as to the wisdom of the thing ebbing away. So do our wishes give colour to our hopes—while hope deepens to conviction.

"Only six days more!" he told her again at parting. "Next Thursday you are mine!"

XXII

THE LETTER

"HERE'S a letter for you, sir."

The horse shied as the misshapen figure of the hunchback emerged from the shadow of the horse-blocks.

"Hello, Sandy! You haven't waited all this time just to give me a letter?"

"I forgot to give it to you at supper, and I 'lowed maybe you'd want to see it soon as you come. I wan't sleepy."

McLain laid his hand on the boy's shoulder as he would have patted the head of his dog, and the cripple's face was illumined. The caress paid him for his vigil.

"Thank you, Sandy. It was very 'clever' of you, as you people say. But you mustn't do it any more. After this if I am not here when I'm due, you are to go to bed and I'll take care of Milo myself. I can't have you losing your beauty sleep on my account. But now that you've done it, rub him down a bit before you put him up. I rode him rather hard." He had indeed ridden him fiercely, exultantly.

When they were gone he sat down on the steps of the portico. It was too warm to go in, late as it was. The blood was coursing riotously through his veins. It seemed to him that he should never want to sleep again —so alive did he feel. He would be content to sit here forever under the stars, dreaming dreams of Jean and the future.

His future! The word thrilled him as even her name did not. He had thought that for him the future, as

a man counts it, was a dead thing—a valley of dry bones where lay the slain,—Reputation and Hope and Opportunity. For five long years he had walked in this valley; had walked and talked with its grisly inhabitants; and to the voices that asked him mockingly, "Can these bones live?" he had answered, not as the prophet, "Lord God, thou knowest," but from the black depths of his humiliation, "No! This is past help of man or God."

But now—even within a few short hours—the dry bones had begun to stir; flesh and sinews were rehabilitating them; they took on the semblance of things he once had known; and as in the days of creation the breath of life was breathed into their nostrils and they became living souls. It was a miracle! His valley was peopled again, not with the ghosts of what had been but with warm flesh and blood that walked beside him. Hope whispered to him; flowers sprang up on every side; the ecstatic note of the song bird trilling to his mate was sounding in his ear; Opportunity smiled and beckoned to him—how blind were they who said she comes but once!

That the confidence of his friends and neighbours was his, as evidenced by their proffers of support, and as shown in what Dr. Dabney and Colonel Judd had this night said to him, touched McLain with a strange humility. A sense of the nearness of God—his mother's God—stole over him. His trangression had been blotted out and his sin was remembered against him no more. A place in the world was to be his again. A good man had given him his chance, and God was helping him! It remained only for him to do his part. Holding the letter tightly and looking up he prayed "Lord God! . . . Give me but the opportunity to prove that I am a man!"

It was in this mood and with this prayer on his lips that McLain went into the house. As he crossed the threshold his tense look of exaltation softened almost

to a smile. After all, public life was only a part of it!

The hall was dimly lighted from the opening into the library beyond, where on the high, old-fashioned mantel a wax candle burned. The Oaks was ready for the coming of the mistress, and as he looked around McLain saw everywhere evidences of her touch. He stood a moment in the doorway of the room and gazed at it, wondering—in his man's helplessness at fashioning a house into a home—how she had done it.

The room was the same—the great, square, twenty-foot room of *ante-bellum* days in old Missouri; and yet as different as was his life to-day with its new buoyancy from the dead hopelessness of one year ago. And it was her hand that had transformed them both!

He recalled with a smile the hideous aspect of this room the day she looked upon it first and said it had possibilities;—the dark, monstrous wall paper, the smoke-grimed ceiling, and the tawdry graining of the woodwork. All was gloom—nothing but gloom and warring colours. But now——

Those sombre, discordant tints had given place to soft, shaded tones of grey and white, as she had said they should. At the windows hung the graceful folds of madras and white Holland shades that tempered the light without excluding it, and on the waxed floor lay luxurious rugs—not of Mrs. Debo's fashioning. It all formed a harmonious background for the pieces of old mahogany which had but that day been put in place and were still unfamiliar to him. He looked at them curiously. They were her mother's, brought from her grandfather Charlton's as her portion of the family heirlooms and now coming to Jean by natural descent.

Among them was a massive writing desk that had been her grandfather's. It was a handsome thing, and she had assigned it to McLain for his own—a wedding gift from his new-found ancestors, she gaily told him. He had been arranging his papers in it to-day, for every-

thing was to be in readiness for the home-coming after the marriage ceremony.

As he stood looking at the Charlton mahogany and smiling to think of Jean's enjoyment of her heirlooms, he glanced instinctively at the low bookshelves around one side of the room. They were filled with the books that had been coming to him through the last few weeks. On the fly leaf of most of them was written in a scholarly hand:

"John Archer McLain"

and a date of a generation ago, while in the upper right hand corner of each book was a printed label bearing the same name, a number filled out in ink, and beneath this two mottoes, one supplementing the other:

"Buy the truth and sell it not."
"And the truth shall make you free."

They were his father's books, and as he looked at them in this new setting he felt a not unnatural satisfaction that he could match the Charlton pride of family with a more noble pride of intellect and inherited scholarship.

"It will be a mingling of two strains of good blood," he thought, "whatever may be said it will be that, and please God, we'll keep it so!"

On the bookcases were the bowls of June roses that they had this day gathered. They filled the night air with their fragrance.

"It's all simple and sweet and pure!" he thought, summing it up. "It's like herself—God bless her!"

The old grandfather's clock in the hall, which was Jean's choicest possession, chimed out the hour of midnight. McLain counted the strokes mechanically, smiling to himself again at thought of the long time he had spent here day-dreaming. As he started to take up the

candlestick, the letter which he had all this time held slipped from his grasp. He picked it up and looked idly at the postmark; but it was blurred and illegible. Then setting the candle down on the mantel he tore off the end of the envelope and took out the letter, glancing at the heading,—St. George, Utah. . . . Well, that told nothing. He had heard of St. George, principally as a stronghold of Mormonism, but he knew nobody there. Still, it was Utah, and a vague uneasiness stirred within him.

"My dear McLain" [the letter began], "you doubtless will be surprised to hear from me after all this time, and perhaps not much pleased. But I have just heard a piece of news so astounding, and affecting you so vitally that——"

McLain turned the page sharply. Who was this from anyway? The name at the bottom end of the letter did not reassure him. It was Calvin Judd. A thrill of apprehension shot through him. What could Calvin Judd be writing to him about? . . . What was his news? A pregnant foreboding of evil was settling down upon him. He stood staring at the name as if it had some evil fascination for him. . . . What—could Judd—be writing to him about? Then with an impatient gesture as if throwing off any unformulated fear he turned the page and read again from the beginning of the sentence:

"But I have just heard a piece of news so astounding, and affecting you so vitally that I write to apprise you of it without delay.

"You remember my telling you about Mulnix,—how he was captured in the canyon, and taken back to the pen. A few weeks ago he finished serving his sentence and the time added for that fool escapade. Well! Just

before he was to be released, some boys out on a tramp in Parley's Canyon came upon the skeleton of a man half hidden under a mass of dirt and stones that had fallen upon him from the dugway. That man was clothed in rotting prison garments; he was just about your size; and on his blouse was *your number.* Can you take that in and realize what it may mean to you?"

The white-faced man clutching the letter and staring at it with eyes which saw not the words written there but only the possibilities wrapped up in them, did take it in in all its entirety,—took it in with a rush of emotion that threatened to shut off his breath. . . . It would mean freedom to him! Freedom and deliverance from the body of this death to which he had been so long chained!

He turned to the letter again.

"This fellow Mulnix was questioned closely about you without letting him know anything about this find, but he denied that he had seen you in the canyon at all, or that he knew anything about you. Of course it was the fact that you both escaped at the same time that threw suspicion on him. Questioned further, he told conflicting stories from time to time, and finally that he did see you in the canyon, that you quarrelled, and that you struck him down and left him for dead. This story he sticks to. But there were your skeleton, your clothes, and *your number* to give the lie to it. Oh, circumstantial evidence is a fine thing! Well, the upshot of it all is that when Mulnix walked out of the prison gates a free man it was only to be met with a warrant for his arrest on a charge of murder. Before the poor devil had time to see that the sky was blue and the trees still green he had been tried, convicted, and sentenced to life imprisonment—*for your murder!* You see, circumstantial evidence was strong against him; his own contradictory

testimony was damning; and the fellow's record did the rest.

"I suppose I may as well tell you, McLain, that if I had been in Salt Lake at the time of the trial, or had known anything about it, I should have been forced by my sense of justice to tell that you were alive. I really think I should, though it would have been a mighty unsavoury mess for an ex-sheriff who had winked at your escape to be mixed up in. But as luck would have it I was down in southern Utah prospecting at the time and saw no papers. I never heard one word about it till yesterday; but I have it from a source that is unquestionable. *The man is in the penitentiary now serving a life sentence for your murder,* while you are entering upon the rôle of a reputable citizen. Isn't it a travesty on justice?

"I tell you when I heard this thing it shook me up considerably. I took one night to sleep over it and make up my mind what my responsibility in the matter was."

Archer McLain reached for a chair to steady himself.

"If I hadn't been fool enough to be wheedled into holding my tongue when I ought to have spoken out I would never have found myself involved in this wretched complication. It was a mistake ever to have let this thing between you and Jean Dabney go on. But now that it is done, and irrevocable, for I suppose by this time she is your wife, I don't know that I feel called upon to put the knife to my old friend's heart (and his child's) by speaking up now. Mulnix has no family and is a hardened criminal. The world will be better off to have him behind prison bars. That relieves me of some responsibility. And I honestly believe that you have the making of a man in you if you have a chance. I've promised to give you that chance. I've given you my word that I would keep my hands off, and by the Eternal! I am going

to stand by it, right or wrong! This thing has got beyond me. It's up to you and the Almighty now. I wash my hands of all responsibility about it. Let me hear from you.

"Yours truly,

"CALVIN JUDD."

After the first mention of Mulnix's name McLain had read rapidly, urged on by a maddening anxiety to know what Judd was going to do. Upon this man again rested his fate. He was nerved to the worst—the worst being that Judd might already have given him up and be writing this to tell him so and put him on his guard. When he reached the final word and realized that the ex-sheriff had simply thrust the responsibility into his (McLain's) hands and stood from under, he could hardly trust the evidence of his eyes. He had lived long while reading this letter. He dropped into the nearest chair now, feeling suddenly spent and strengthless. . . . Judd would stand by him! . . . For some moments he sat there feeling nothing, realizing nothing but an overpowering relief. . . . Judd—would—stand by him!

Then as his faculties began to assert their independence of this paralyzing fear that had fallen upon them and to work more normally he perceived with access of confidence which was positive joy that Judd's attitude in the matter was not entirely on account of love for his old friend and his old friend's child, nor even because he had given his word that he (McLain) should have a chance. In a way, Judd had involved himself by his connivance at the escape of a criminal. True, he was not now an officer of the law, but he had been at the time of the escape, and his commission had expired so short a time before that accidental meeting at Dr. Dabney's and all its chain of results that as he himself had said, it would be an "unsavoury mess" for him to be mixed up in. People would be quick to think, in the absence of proof to the contrary (and proof could never

be given in a case like that), that the usual motive had influenced him. Money is more potent in such cases usually than disinterested love of friends. . . . No, there was no doubt that Judd had compromised himself somewhat—well, perhaps not that exactly—but at least had placed himself by his silence where it would be awkward now for him to speak out. There is nothing like self-interest to seal a man's lips.

All this McLain saw more and more clearly the longer he pondered the matter, and his spirits lightened proportionately. With Judd's lips sealed—no matter what the compelling power—generosity or self-interest, and with all quest for himself ended by the finding of what was supposed to be his body, the danger of discovery was immeasurably decreased. Why, in the eyes of the law and of the officers of the law who had been on the hunt for him he was dead! Dead! There was no danger now of anybody's being on the track. He was dead and buried, and the great grist of crime would soon crowd from the public mind all remembrance of him. He was virtually safe.

He could have wept for joy as this conviction came gradually upon him. He felt an impulse to fall on his knees. All the way he had been helped to escape. There seemed an element of fate in the passages opened to him, and the ease with which he had slipped into them. His mind sped back to the moment when in that mad dash for liberty he had taken to the nearest canyon and fled on and on, expecting every moment to hear the rifle's crack and see his pursuers behind him. But they had not come. . . . Why?

And then to come upon this man—of all improbable things, a dead man there in the canyon! To be sure, it was no such unusual thing for a dead man to be found in a canyon—they were found there oftener than anywhere else in that country, and it was easy to see, from the broken bottle in his pocket and the crumbled dugway

above, how and why this one had come here. . . . But why was it *he* instead of Mulnix that was destined to find him?

And at the last when Mulnix did come and they fought for the chance, why was it *his* arm that prevailed? Mulnix was stronger than he. . . . Why? . . . Because it was fate—the whole thing was fate—even to his being thrown here into this community,—flung headlong, so that he had no choice but to stay, until—well, until he no longer wished to go. Somebody's hand was in it—God's, Dr. Dabney would probably say . . . yes, it certainly did seem as if God had been on his side! And again he had that strange impulse to throw himself on his knees.

A deep and reverent feeling stole over him which was as near akin to religious exaltation as anything he had ever experienced. He had asked God for the opportunity to prove his manhood, and He had given it to him. His feet had slipped, but they were set now upon a rock, and beyond was the pathway that led to peace. He closed his eyes with a feeling of ineffable relief.

Then, without warning, the serpent glided across this path and transfixed him with a single word.

But—*Mulnix!*

XXIII

THE FIGHT

THE colour dropped from the man's face as mercury drops from a broken bulb. His jaw fell with that nervelessness which betokens vacuity of mind; and without moving his body he turned his head with a slow and stealthy motion, looking behind him furtively as if he feared that in some dim corner the man with the club was lurking, ready to fall upon him.

Then, with a sigh of relief and a half-foolish look on his face as if he were ashamed of this involuntary weakness, he sank back in his chair and brought his mind forcibly to bear on the subject before him. And as he went deeper and deeper into it his countenance changed, an evil light began to creep into his eyes, and the lines of his mouth hardened.

"Well, what of Mulnix?" he demanded at length, throwing up his head and looking straight ahead of him with narrowing eyes and lips that tightened as if he were defying some invisible questioner. "He is nothing to me! I didn't put him there!"

He reiterated this insistently, in varying forms. "I have no responsibility in the matter! I will not take any. And, by Heaven! no man shall thrust it upon me!" He was breathing hard. "I didn't put him there!"

Then to the question inevitably following he answered himself doggedly, "Who did? Why, a chain of evil chances, I suppose, for which nobody is to blame—forged by the Evil One, for aught I know"—forgetting

that but a moment ago he had called his chain of fortuitous circumstances Providence.

"No! I had nothing to do with it—and I'm not going to suffer for it, either! I didn't put Mulnix there—and I'm not keeping him there! . . . I'm—not—keeping——"

The word died in his throat and he clutched at it from the outside, a swift look of terror coming into his face, over which the greyness that is worse than pallor was stealing. A terrified look came into his eyes, and again in the dim room there was that furtive turning of the head, that fearful looking behind him for a shape.

And this time, be it recorded in all solemnity and all truth, the man was there, armed not with a club but with the three smooth stones that McLain's own words had placed in his sling—"keeping—him—there." And they grappled and fought with a ferocity and stubbornness that made that conflict in the canyon, which was but a material one, seem child's play. And the thing they fought for now—as then—was the chance!

"Whe-w-w!"

The ejaculation was born of that struggle. McLain wiped the sweat from his face, shaking his head and saying aloud:

"I've got to think this thing out! I am losing my nerve—and my senses, with it, I think. I—I can't seem to get the right focus on things."

He got up and strode across the room, back and forth, back and forth—past the stored up wisdom of his father's books,—wisdom that was for other crises than this, surely—past the heirlooms that stood as so many monuments of the Charlton pride—past the roses that Jean's hand had placed here—back and forth, back and forth, seeing nothing, heeding nothing but the problem before him; and at last sitting down at his desk determined that he would compel himself to think clearly and consecutively.

"The man is a hardened criminal," he said to himself, outlining the case, "a foredoomed criminal. His record shows that. Three terms, Judd said, and he told me himself that he had been in since he was nineteen, with only two breathing spells between commitments. How could one expect a man like that to keep out if by any chance, or any sacrifice, he should get out? . . . Oh, no! It wouldn't be worth it! . . . It would be utterly useless—an insane self-immolation that would bring no adequate results." Indeed, he assured himself, it was not improbable that this sentence, severe as it was, might even save the man from a worse fate,—the gallows. . . . There was a grain of consolation in that thought.

Yes, Mulnix was a bad man. Judd had said that the world would be better off with him behind prison bars. Society needed protection from such men. But——

For life!

Ah-h! . . . that was a hard sentence!

The prison rose before him in mute protest at its severity. Not that it was a bad place, as prisons went—Utah was more merciful to her outcasts, he found, than many an older commonwealth—but, after all, a prison. Noisome odours assailed his nostrils; prison silences again overwhelmed him; he shut his eyes and saw the sullen faces of men clothed in the garb of shame—Mulnix had never once been promoted to plain clothes, which of itself showed that he was lost to shame and ambition, for in the Utah prison any man might hope to attain to plain clothes by good conduct.

Why, Mulnix was even put periodically into the dark cell—that grim substitute for a dungeon where the prisoners were confined for insubordination. "That brings 'em to!" he once heard a guard say, significantly. And small wonder—shut up as a man was there in outer darkness, inside a sweat box, food thrust in as to some wild beast through a grating that closed again to exclude even a friendly ray of light. Necessary? Perhaps so,

It is not for the irresponsible laity to question, but McLain shivered at the thought of even Mulnix in it—and he would be in it many times in the course of such a sentence as——

God! what a sentence that was!

He staggered to the open window, threw up the screen—impatient of the slightest restraint—and thrust his body halfway out, drinking in great draughts of air. It was filled with the perfume of the Baltimore Belle—the old bush that he and Jean had stood under only yesterday picking its clusters for the rose bowls. . . . Was that only yesterday? . . . From the flower garden where they had walked yesterday—if it *was* yesterday—was borne to him on the night wind the spicy scent of the clove pinks that bordered the flower beds. It was all just as she had wanted it. Now, the clove pink is the sweetest old flower in all the world, and its pungent fragrance nobody ever forgets;—but to the man drawing in great breaths of it with senses preternaturally acute, it suddenly became intolerable.

He drew inside and sat down heavily, his gaze wandering aimlessly around the room. It lighted upon Jean's sewing table that had been her mother's, and her grandmother's before that, over in the corner of the great fireplace—the kind women rave over nowadays—a stand with a leaf on either side that lifts, and two drawers with glass knobs. On it was a little sewing basket that she had brought over the day before—"just to see how it would look," she had said, blushing and half laughing at her own impatience to try the effect of every old familiar thing in this new and wonderful setting of joint ownership.

He looked at it dully at first; then crossing the room stood beside it, opening and shutting the drawers and fingering the contents of the basket—the spools, the dainty needle-book, the bits of lace and embroidery,—feeling as he did so a dull aching of the throat such as

he had not experienced since he was a child and struggled to keep back unmanly emotion.

Here, near the table was her little rocker; the big one beyond it was his own. She had placed them here together in front of the fireplace only yesterday, explaining to him as he listened with mock deference that this should be her side and that his, and that in the winter evenings he should read aloud to her from all these books while she sewed,—no, not the theological ones, of course, but the juicy ones. And he had agreed, only insisting that there must not be so much as a table between them. He shut his teeth hard, but it could not keep back the groan forced through them at the thought of those idle words; for he knew that however this thing terminated it would leave between them forever, not a table, not an insensate piece of wood—oh, no! but a hideous spectre clothed in stripes.

After all, the human heart, with its hopes and its despairs, changes little from age to age. At that sweet innocent picture of home life which but yesterday was within his grasp and to-day was slipping from it like the baseless fabric of a dream, the cry wrung from him was a repetition of the one wailed forth on old Judea's plains:

"Our holy . . . and our beautiful house is burned up with fire and all our pleasant places are laid waste."

But as he stood looking at these things a distinct revulsion of feeling came over him. He perceived with relief that he had not even yet got things in focus. They were still distorted, and he went back to his desk and sat down determined to try once more to look at this thing dispassionately and sanely.

He had been thinking of himself and Mulnix as the chief actors in this tragedy and as such the ones to be thought of now. But it was not true that they were the first to be considered. There was Jean! . . . He

and Mulnix were men, and must be expected to bear any fate that their own misdeeds had brought upon them, but when it came to bringing disgrace and ruin on a woman—a defenceless woman whose honour, whose happiness, whose very life lay in this decision—that was different. What compulsion was on him to drag her down with him? as he must if this were known. . . . It would kill her! He might better himself put a knife to her heart—it would be more merciful. . . . Jean, his little Jean!

And that old man, her father, who had so freely opened his home to him and permitted him to enter its inner circle; who had given to him the one priceless treasure of his heart; who he knew loved and leaned upon him as a son. He had been so glad and proud to yield his strength for this, for he had a curious feeling that in giving Jean's father a son's filial care he was making restitution to his own mother. . . . Could he ruthlessly and at one blow strike from this old man's hand that prop, and bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave? Surely, surely it was not required of any man that he bring ruin on his own household! . . . Yes, . . . of course . . . but Mulnix had no family! That made a difference—and ought to make a difference. If men involved only themselves——

He broke off this train abruptly, realizing that the hour was late for that argument. . . . No, he had no family either, in the eyes of the law, but so far as the disgrace was concerned it was the same as if she were his wife. . . . If it had only come earlier—if it had come last winter when Judd came—but now. . . . Just one week before! . . . He could not do it! It was monstrous to expect it—and for a beast like Mulnix —no human ties—no character—no future!

And then strangely enough there shot through him a pang of pity for a man cut off from human ties and foredoomed to a life of crime. He had had his day of

grace and sinned it away, but to Mulnix it had never come.

He fell back then upon Judd's letter and the implication that society should be protected from such a man—a criminal serving a third term. It was true. Such a man was a distinct menace to the State. And Judd had acknowledged that he saw in him (McLain) the making of a useful citizen if he but had the chance. . . . Oh, *God!* for the chance!—the chance that he had once thrown so wilfully away! Was it demanded of him that he throw it away again? Surely, surely not!

But—for *life!*

The old clock on the stairs ticked the minutes and tolled the hours unheeded, and still the battle raged.

But it was going against him—that was plain to be seen. The invisible forces were closing in on him. When the night had worn away to that hour just before dawn when, physicians tell us, more souls slip their mortal moorings and drift out than at any other in the twenty-four, because then vitality is weakest and our powers of resistance are at their lowest ebb, he opened a drawer and took out a revolver. It was one he had bought with the first money earned after his escape—bought with the deliberate, settled purpose—which he had never seen fit to renounce—of using it if ever need came. As he held it in his hand now, and examined it carefully to make sure there would be no bungling, reflecting that with one little click all would be over, it seemed a swift and easy way out. And as apathetically as he looked at the instrument did he survey the unfathomable abyss on whose brink he stood. On this side—and imminent—were disgrace, unending obloquy, and the certain loss of all that made life worth living. On that—rest from this conflict at least—and sleep. To his tortured nerves these two things seemed just then the great desideratum. He raised the glittering, deadly thing with a steady hand, closed his eyes, and——

"My son! . . . My son!"

The voice fell on his ear—so low, so thrillingly sweet, so familiar in its remembered cadences of tender pleading that involuntarily he looked around him expecting to see her bodily presence. In the excited state of his overwrought fancy it would have been no more miraculous than to hear her voice—and it was her voice! To his dying day he believed it.

But in the darkness, though he felt for her as a child feels for its mother's hand, he could not discern her. Nothing was there but the dim outlines of the furniture seen through the struggling dawn. The candle had flickered out.

He put the revolver back in the drawer.

"It was the coward's way," he told himself with bitter contempt. "I will not leave her that to bear, at least. . . . Besides, what good would that do Mulnix?"

He got up then and went again to the open window, drawing a chair close to it and dropping into it, for he felt physically spent from his long vigil. In the east were the first faint rosy streaks that foretold the coming of another day. He looked at them dully as they deepened and broadened and mounted higher. If there is anything in nature that bears Hope in its very arms it is the coming of the dawn. But it was not beautiful to him; it brought no promise of joy—no prophecy of peace; it was but the harbinger of the onrush of doom. How could he get through this day—and the rest of the days? They would come as irresistibly as this was coming—only he would not be here to see them. And the days there——

The morning air rustled the fresh June foliage and fanned his hot forehead. It was very grateful to him. He closed his eyes with a dim hope that Nature's soothing touch would be laid on his burning heart as well.

To have to give it all up! To face defeat at last! To be shut out from all this by prison bars! A marvellous thing is a man's memory—that impalpable, intangible essence which by any chance wind of circumstance—a sound, an odour, a word, it may be—can catch us up and with the speed of lightning transport us across time and space and set us down bodily in the midst of old-time pleasure or pain. Ah, Memory is a divine gift, but it has its stings. McLain could hear at that moment the clang of a hundred iron doors as in obedience to the will of one ponderous arm they shot into place—and upon his tense ear fell again the grating of the monster key that with one turn held all those poor wretches there like so many rats in a trap. . . . And "at the prison gates——" Judd had said!

The trees stirred joyously to meet the coming day; sweet odours from the honeysuckle and the new-mown grass were wafted to him; the squirrels were chasing each other and chattering in the dim old oaks; the birds were beginning their matin hymns. . . . "Before he had time to see that the sky was blue"—oh, *why* must Judd have put it in that senseless way? . . . "or the leaves still green!"

He closed his eyes and drew in a great draught of air at the thought of receding sunlight, moonlight, starlight. How large commonplace things loomed on his horizon now that they were disappearing! How much greater are the simple joys of life than any other if we only knew it! Breath in our nostrils, God's sunlight, food and raiment, June days, love, and the humblest home of our own fashioning! . . . Ah!

Somehow the moonlight and Dr. Dabney's steps were beating themselves into his brain with insistent force, and one particular May night stood out from the rest. They had been sitting on the steps, he and Jean, talking of the future opening up before them, when the call came for prayers. He had not listened very closely to

the reading, his mind being full of weightier matters until his attention was aroused and held by something that seemed a message to himself, so sharply did the words stand out from everything else. It was almost as if they had been etched upon his consciousness by the powerful acid of conscience.

"God is not mocked," the benign old man was reading, "whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap."

He had listened to it with startled apprehension—followed by amusement at his own credulity. This was the statement of a natural law—the law upon which his success as a tiller of the soil would depend. As to its spiritual meaning—he shrugged his shoulders. It was hard to get away from those old outgrown superstitions. Then he had cast it from him and gone back to the steps and the moonlight and the planning, and had forgotten all about it. . . . But it was true! Sitting here with the ruins of his house about him, precipitated by one weak moment, he knew that it was true! He had sowed the wind that day years ago—not viciously, but with reckless disregard of right—and this that he was reaping to-night was the whirlwind!

McLain became conscious after a while that he was cold. The wind had changed, and lying as he was with his shoulders on the window sill the chill of the early morning had got into his very marrow and made him numb. He stood up and looked around him vacantly as if for a moment he had lost himself. Then he went into the next room, opened a cupboard, and took down a flask of whiskey, pouring some into a glass and drinking it down at one draught, as a man in great need; after which, looking neither to right nor left, he went heavily back into the room he had left—out into the hall—up the stairs where the old clock ticked as he had never heard it before:

"Never—forever!
Forever—never!"

past the open doorway of the chamber in blue and gold that was to have been *hers*—and on to his own room. Here, throwing himself on the bed, he fell almost immediately into the deep sleep of physical exhaustion.

XXIV

CONFESSION

"MR. McLAIN! . . . Mr. *McLain!*"

He woke from this blessed oblivion to find the day well advanced and Mrs. Debo standing over him, shaking him vigorously by the shoulder. He sat up and stared at her, still half-dazed.

"Well?" he said. "What is it? Is anything the matter?"

"That's what I'd like to know, and if you can't tell I don't know who can. Are you sick?"

"No."

"Well, breakfast has been waiting for three hours. I've knocked at this door and peeped in a good half-dozen times, and finally I got scared about you. I thought maybe you had had a stroke, or passed away in sleep."

He looked at her dumbly. That were a consummation devoutly to be wished. "Send me a cup of strong coffee. That is all I want."

She was giving his haggard face a critical look.

"I reckon you better come down to the dining-room ef you ain't sick. Sandy's gone to work and my rheumatism is pretty bad this morning." She was thinking, "I don't know what has come to him, but a good meal o' victuals gen'ally helps—whatever it is. I'll stir up some waffles for him instead of them half-cold biscuits."

He half smiled at the thought of one's housekeeper taking him in hand in this way, but seeing through her subterfuge, made no further resistance.

"Very well, I'll be down."

He made his toilet with deliberation, half wondering as he looked at his own reflection in the mirror before which he was shaving if this were really he, and if the events of last night were but the phantasm of a dream. He seemed to have exhausted all power to feel, and found himself thinking of the man downstairs last night as one thinks of another—impersonally. He could not understand the apathy that had fallen upon him, but certainly it was a great relief. It seemed as if nothing mattered any more, or ever would. Even the inevitable interview with Dr. Dabney which he had shrunk from last night so unspeakably was contemplated now with perfect calm. And when in going downstairs he passed the open door of the blue and gold room and stepped in looking stolidly around, he thought almost in awe, "Something in me must have died last night. I can't account for it any other way. . . . Well, may it never come to life!"

At the breakfast table, set down to broiled chicken and the hot waffles that Mrs. Debo, thinking of his face, brought in crisp and smoking with reckless disregard of her rheumatism, he ate with his usual relish, thinking contemptuously that the physical man was left, at any rate. Perhaps it was the spiritual that had passed away.

At the door of the dining-room he turned as if intending to speak, and the housekeeper stood waiting with quickened pulse under her stolid exterior. She knew there was something to tell. But he apparently thought better of it if he had such a thought, for he went out of the room without a word.

"He's down, sure," thought Mrs. Debo, looking after him, "and when a person is, it ain't no time then to pound him with questions."

From the dining-room McLain went straight to the telephone and called up Dr. Dabney's residence. The doctor himself answered it, leaving his study and the

final looking over of to-morrow's sermon to do so. It was an infinite relief to McLain to hear his voice instead of Jean's. It would have complicated things if she had come.

Was Jean at home? he enquired, with the thought in his mind that if she were he would ask the doctor to come over to The Oaks.

No, the doctor explained, regretfully, Jean had gone to town to get a few last things, he believed. Was there any message?

No. No message. Was Miss Lavinia there?

The minister was sorry that Miss Lavinia too was away—he was alone. Was anything wanted?

"Yes, doctor," said McLain then, speaking with greater freedom, "there is a matter that I want to talk over with you this afternoon if I may."

"Yes, yes." Dr. Dabney was not without a vein of humour. McLain could distinctly hear his laugh over the telephone, which struck him as a ghastly thing. It was that little matter of the ceremony, he supposed. Jean had been worrying over that too, but he thought that after forty years or so of marriage ceremonies he would be able to get through one more—even if it did come a little close home. Couldn't he come over and take dinner with him? Then they could talk it over at their leisure.

No. He would be over about two o'clock if that time would suit him, McLain said, and hung the receiver up abruptly, feeling the impossibility of continuing this conversation.

From the telephone he went to his desk, writing letters and assorting papers, some of which he took to his room and locked in a trunk with a pile of old letters addressed all in the same cramped, feminine hand. When he got through Grandfather Charlton's desk was as bare as it was yesterday before he had put his belongings into it. Only pen, ink, and paper were left, and with these he

sat down to write. He had already written two letters. The first—a short one—had been penned without a tremor, though it was the crucial one, for had it not been sent the others would have been unnecessary. The second, addressed to Judge Haliday, was longer and had been given more thought, but that too had been written with no faltering hand. It was only when this last letter was essayed that his vocabulary failed.

Time after time he began only to cast the sheet aside and take another. How could he begin? What words could he use that would make her understand? At last, drawing a sheet toward him with a kind of desperate determination, he wrote rapidly page after page, not stopping to change a word or to recast a sentence. And then when the last syllable was penned and he had read it carefully over, weighing what he had said over against what he had wanted to say, the futility of it all came over him, and gathering up the crumpled, mutilated attempts at a beginning he placed them on the hearthstone between the brass andirons that had come down from the Charltons, laid the written sheets one by one upon the pile, and put a match to the whole, saying to himself as he watched them go up in smoke:

"Thus is our hearth fire kindled . . . and thus it goes out! . . . Futile, like the rest!"

When he heard Mrs. Debo in the dining-room a moment later he called her in, telling her without looking up that he had been suddenly called away and should start that night. Would she pack his portmanteau with a few changes of underclothes and so forth?

Must she pack his new suit? she asked, stolidly.

No.

His grey one?

No.

She asked no further questions, remembering his face that morning and noticing that it was beginning to have that same strained look. He felt an almost absurd grati-

tude for her silence. It seemed an earnest of what he might depend upon.

When Sandy brought his horse to the door he mounted and rode away, and the hard-featured woman's face worked as she looked after him.

"It's hit him hard!" she said. "Whatever it is, it's hit him hard! Well, there's nothin' for Drusilla to do but to hold her tongue. Maybe that'll help some."

On the road, with every hoofbeat bringing him nearer to this fateful interview, Milo was soon slowed down to a walk. The thought of it grew momentarily more intolerable. How was he to begin? What could he say that would render it less abrupt? It seemed brutal to go to this unsuspecting old man with a tale like this! When he had talked with him over the telephone he had intended to prepare Dr. Dabney, in a way, by speaking of some great trouble that had come to him. That would have thrown the burden of enquiry upon the doctor and the subject would have been introduced naturally. But the minister's tacit assumption that it was the trivial subject of a ring ceremony he wished to talk about had broken him up at the telephone, and he had said none of the things that might have helped.

Nor did Dr. Dabney's cheerful, friendly greeting make the telling of such a tale as his easier.

"How are you, Archer, my boy? Glad to see you when I can have you to myself. Will you come in or sit out here?"

"Here, if you please." It seemed to him at that moment that he could not cross this old man's threshold.

So they sat down together on the vine-covered porch where he had sat so many times with Jean—the young man with dry lips, the older one gently garrulous. If Dr. Dabney noticed his visitor's unusual reticence he made no sign. Perhaps, remembering Grandfather Charlton and his own youth, he attributed it to a constraint not unnatural under the circumstances. At all

events, he rambled on upon indifferent subjects, giving McLain time to recover himself,—an opportunity which to the doctor's surprise he did not seem very prompt to avail himself of, for his embarrassment increased with every moment.

"I suppose I was right in surmising that you wanted to consult me about the ceremony, Archer," the minister said, after considerable talk that seemed to lead nowhere. "Genevieve had told me you would be over to ask me some questions in regard to it. She is quite firm for the Episcopal ceremony, as you know (that was her mother's church before she married me); and I think she is a little fearful that a plain Presbyterian minister may not be quite equal to it. But I think there will be no trouble, though I confess to a little more trepidation at the thought of this particular marriage ceremony than of any I have taken part in since the one in which I was an active participant. But not for fear of stumbling over the words—no, no—a misstep like that is easily remedied. . . . Well, I will get the Prayer Book and we will look it over together."

He was gone before McLain could utter a word of protest, and was back in a moment with a little book in which was the name of Mary Charlton. A bookmark was in it at the marriage ceremony.

"It was her mother's," said Dr. Dabney, gently, looking at the girlish handwriting with eyes that were temporarily obscured. "I am very glad to use this ceremony and the little book as well," he continued, taking his glasses off and rubbing them with his handkerchief. "It seems to bring her mother a little nearer to Genevieve at a time when—well, a time when a young girl needs her mother's presence and counsels more than at any other period of her life, perhaps. It is this feeling, doubtless, that makes me unusually tender of my little girl just now—a realization, we might say, that a father cannot be to her what a mother would be in this time

of momentous issues—for that is what marriage is to a woman, my boy——"

He looked up almost appealingly at the young man, and then seeing the look on McLain's face added hastily, fearing he had wounded him by an implied doubt, "Not that I have any misgivings about her choice, Archer—not at all! Not at all! I may not have a better opportunity than this to say to you that when I commit into your hands this sacred trust left to me by her sainted mother I shall have the inestimable assurance that I am giving her into the keeping of a good man and true—one who will make her happiness and her welfare his first concern."

It seemed to the man listening to this that he had had a nerve tapped. If it went on his resolution would be gone.

"Dr. Dabney," he said in a stifled voice, "I am not worthy of this confidence." He could not bring his eyes to meet the benign face opposite him and there was a lifelessness and want of spontaneity in his tone that checked the good doctor's reply. He felt somehow convicted of effusiveness, a thing he disliked and of which he was never guilty.

"We will look the service over later," he said, quietly, closing the book. "I must not allow myself to feel that this marriage ceremony fills your whole horizon. Perhaps I have been looking at it through Genevieve's eyes.

> "'Love is of man's life a thing apart;
> It is a woman's whole existence.'

"Well, well! it is a glorious thing to be a young man with life in all its possibilities opening before you,—business interests—public service—a man's life is a broader one than a woman's in the very nature of things.

"And by the way, Archer, while we have the opportunity I want to recur to what we were speaking of last night. I have been thinking quite seriously about that

proposition. I think there is a leading in it, my boy. I do, indeed. Coming to you unsolicited as it does, it would seem to me to be the voice of God speaking through the mouth of the people. It is an honourable ambition to wish to serve one's kind, and the path of service and usefulness opens up to us but one step at a time. There is a call for men of character to enter into the councils of the State—the Nation."

McLain tried to speak, but the doctor was not through.

"I am not sure that I am giving you quite orthodox advice for a minister of the Gospel, for there is a disposition on the part of many estimable people to look askance at politics and those who hold office. But the work must be done by some one, and if good men stand aloof bad men will necessarily be in control."

Again the young man tried to speak, but the minister waved his protestations aside.

"I know you are modest, Archer, but public offices should be filled by men beyond reproach. You have the characteristics that are especially needed just now—courage and integrity. I believe you can do your country good service. Yes, the path of life is opening up before you, my boy, and I say to you unhesitatingly, *Enter every open door of usefulness.*"

"Dr. Dabney," said the wretched man, "this door is no longer open to me. My own hand has closed it. I have given up definitely all thought of public life."

Dr. Dabney looked over his glasses at the young man.

"Is not this decision sudden, Archer? I thought last night you seemed to think favourably of it. In fact——"

"Yes, last night!" said McLain, with a groan. "But to-day——"

The quality of despair in his voice attested that between the two points of time was a great gulf fixed. Then by a superhuman effort he pulled himself together and looked into the clergyman's perplexed face.

"Dr. Dabney, I have a difficult task before me, and

your generous words do not make it easier. . . . It is hard, I say, for one man to acknowledge to another—especially when they bear the relation to one another that exists between us—that he is a fraud and a cheat"—Dr. Dabney started—"but it is what I have come to acknowledge to you to-day. . . . You have shown me every kindness, every confidence, since the day I came into your home—and I have basely requited it. For in all that time my life has been one—living—lie!"

"Archer,"—Dr. Dabney spoke soothingly—"are you sure you are quite well?" He was thinking of the blow on the young man's head and the uneasiness it had occasioned Dr. Llewellyn.

"I am not delirious, doctor. . . . In fact, I think I am just 'coming to myself.' But let me tell you the tale while I can, for I am losing my courage."

"Go on," said the minister.

"The little I have told you about myself and my early life is true,"—the man dropped into narrative almost with a tone of relief. At last the thing would be out and the burden of secrecy roll from him. "I think I have told you that I was an only child, my sister having died in infancy, and that my mother was a widow. My father was John Archer McLain, a minister who died when I was too young to remember him, but my mother has told me that she had no higher ambition for me than that I should be like him,—a hope which I am bound to say was blasted. What I did not tell you was that my mother married again after my father's death—a Mr. John A. Branham, and that I have been known through the greater part of my life as John Branham. My stepfather was a good man—an upright man—who had accumulated quite an amount of property, and who from the time of his marriage seemed fond of me. As the years passed and there appeared to be no prospect of his having children of his own to inherit his property

he conceived the idea of legally adopting me and having me take his name. He did so, and thereafter called me John, which was my first name, though to my mother I was always Archer. It was his fancy to have me John A. Branham, Jr., and the change was easily made, for about that time we moved to New York City, and I was so entered in school."

He paused in his recital, stooping to pick up the Prayer Book which had slipped from Dr. Dabney's hand.

"There are two things I shall always feel thankful for: one, that I never gave my stepfather an undutiful word; and the other, that he died when he did. If only my mother could have gone with him! . . . And yet—I have sometimes thought that if he had lived and I had had a father's counsels as I was entering upon youth things might have been different. I had the tenderest mother that ever a man had, but, doctor, a boy needs a father—to tell him things, to put him on his guard against the temptations that are bound to come. A woman doesn't know the world as a man does—she can't!"

"And God be thanked!" said the minister. "How old were you when your stepfather died?"

"About thirteen. Well, as I say, my mother gave me every advantage that her means could compass. I went through college with a fairly good record, though I must say, to be truthful, that it was not in the classroom that I excelled so much as on the athletic field. I was the sprinter of our team. I think I have told you all this before, but it is well to verify what I can as I go along." He spoke scornfully. "After my graduation I went abroad for a year as a part of my education. I had graduated unusually early and my mother wanted me to have this year before studying for a profession. I returned with a cough which caused her much alarm, as there was a tendency in the family to pulmonary trouble. By the advice of our physician I was hurried

out West. It was a great disappointment to me, for I had expected to take up the study of law.

"I found when I returned from my trip around the world that I ought never to have gone, for my mother's affairs were in an embarrassed condition, owing to some real estate being tied up. But as I said a moment ago she was an exceedingly tender mother and she showed me the mistaken kindness of keeping from me all knowledge of this embarrassment until I returned, denying herself to supply me with money while I was gone, which I am afraid I spent rather freely,—though for this I was not so much to blame, since I was led to suppose there was an abundance of it. By the terms of my stepfather's will his property was to be my mother's during her lifetime and at her death was to come to me. As it had been his wish to provide me with a liberal education, I felt no hesitancy in accepting this at my mother's hands, nor my year of travel, which was considered a part of my education; but when I returned to find her financially straitened—though only temporarily, I was assured by Judge Haliday, who managed her business—the case was different. It was very galling to me to find myself, a semi-invalid, dependent upon my mother. Yet I had no choice but to occupy that position, for my health of course must be the first consideration. I determined, however, to secure the first possible opening I could find in Salt Lake, which was where I went."

"Salt Lake!" exclaimed Dr. Dabney. "I remember now your saying so. That was where Calvin Judd lived."

"Yes," replied McLain, drily, "that was where Calvin Judd lived. . . . Well, I got a position very soon in a bank, but at the pitifully small salary that the Western bank pays its young clerks. You see, so many young fellows go out there for their health, just as I did, who are willing to take almost anything, that it brings

down wages. But, pittance though it was, I was more than glad to get it, for each month it grew more and more galling to me to feel that I, a young fellow nearly twenty-one, was dependent upon my mother. Doctor, it is a grave question in my mind whether a bank has a moral right to place so much opportunity to go wrong in the hands of a boy whose ability to resist is untried, and then tempt him with an inadequate salary. I have thought a good deal about it since.

"Well, I took the place, and learned from my mother's lawyer, not from her, how even this small lift eased the strain upon her. You see, my stepfather's property was largely in city lots which were constantly increasing in value. It would pay her richly to hold on to them if she could be tided over in the meantime. And here was I a constant drain upon her at a time when I should have had my shoulder to the wheel instead. Do you see?"

"I see. It was a trying position."

McLain gave him a grateful look. "I wish I could make you see as easily the temptation that came to me to extricate myself from this position. But I can't do that because you can never make a person understand a temptation that is entirely outside his life and experience—or at least his observation. I suppose you have never been drawn into stock gambling yourself, doctor?"—with a gleam of amusement.

"Never."

"Nor lived where it is prevalent?"

"I have lived in this community all my life."

"Well, naturally your position on the map and the isolation from business pursuits that goes with your calling would tend to keep you from real knowledge of such allurements."

"I am not unaware of the enticements of the gaming table," murmured Dr. Dabney, recalling a sermon in which the dangers had been dwelt upon.

"No. Most clergymen recognize that—theoretically. But I am not speaking of the gaming table. Stock gambling takes in a different kind of sinner—or sucker. . . . You can't understand it until you have lived in a mining community. It's in the air. Everybody goes in out West—men, women, bank clerks, school teachers, shop-girls, office-boys, even household servants. It's an actual fact, doctor! Everybody that can dig up ten dollars puts it into some worthless stock or other. But, Dr. Dabney, I don't want to talk mining stocks to you except so far as it will show you the nature and the insidiousness of the temptation that beset me. It is very important to me that I should do that."

"Go on. I will try to follow you."

"Well,—when I got to Utah the mining business was booming. The *Silver King* had raised men from poverty to affluence in a night, as you may say; and on paper, to a tenderfoot, *Golden Queen* looks as promising as *Silver King*. *Grand Central* was going up by leaps and bounds; *Swansea* was paying monthly dividends that made a boy's wage at a bank seem pitiful. Ah! the temptation to go in with surroundings like that is almost irresistible. The pressure is tremendous. It was too much for me."

"But stocks require capital?"

"Yes."

"And you had no capital."

McLain drummed on the arm of his chair and looked out across the lawn toward the orchard where last night he and Jean had gone looking for harvest apples.

"No. I had no capital, but large capital is not always required for dealing in mining stocks. Perhaps you are thinking of investments. But I didn't wish to invest money; I wanted to make it, and I could make it as well with *Golden Queen* as *Silver King*—or thought I could—if only I had a little to start with. You see it is

this way, doctor—suppose a stock is selling for five cents a share——"

"Five cents! Do they ever sell for as little as that?"

To the doctor "Stocks" were spelled with a capital and suggested Wall Street and large operations.

"Certainly. And they are the kind that get the little fellows. Well—for fifty dollars you could get one thousand shares, and for five hundred dollars you could get ten thousand shares; (and many a man has mortgaged his home for that five hundred, and would mortgage his soul for it at the rumour of a strike)—for don't you see that if the stock should rise but one point—one bare cent—with ten thousand shares he would make a clean one hundred dollars; and if it rose five points—and it often does and far more—he would double his money in a day without so much as turning over his hand. You see?"

"Yes. It would present a temptation. But those stocks must sometimes fall?"

"Oh-h-h, yes! Sometimes they go up like a rocket and come down the same way. But somehow, before you put your money in, it is never *your* stock that the bottom is going to drop out of. You are sure of that, or it wouldn't be your stock, don't you see? And you look at the returns in the evening paper that you can hardly wait for though three months ago you never thought of reading such stuff as stock reports, and you see that *Golden Queen* has risen two points and you say, 'I've lost an even $200 by not buying yesterday,' and Jones tells you at lunch about the $200 he made because he did buy in yesterday, and you look at Jones and think that if Jones could do it you certainly could,—and the fever gets into your veins and the madness in your brain and you are wild to get into the game. And you figure it out on paper in cold figures that won't lie, and the first thing you know you have a fortune—salted down!—if only you had the $500!

"I was modest. I set my figure at $300. I wasn't trying for a fortune, but only for something to eke out my salary so that I should not have to call on my mother, and could show Judge Haliday it was in me, if I had a chance. I wasn't going to stay in the game—I knew too much for that!—but only to dip in now and then when it was perfectly safe. And I thought I knew when it *was* safe! . . . Isn't it pitiful, doctor, how much a boy who is just reaching his majority knows!

"Well, the more I studied the stock list and thought of my own situation the more desperate I became for that $300. I knew I could never squeeze it out of my salary, for that was barely sufficient to keep body and soul together and enable me to dress as my position demanded; it wouldn't have been except for an occasional ten or twenty dollars that my mother sent me surreptitiously out of her own spending money—money that I felt like a dog for keeping, but did keep, because I had to. I knew that by my stepfather's will I was to have one thousand dollars when I was twenty-one. Judge Haliday had talked with me about it before I came West and urged me not to draw it out at that time, because in two years it would treble or quadruple itself. This I had agreed to do, but when *Golden Queen* went up to ten cents—and I had watched it creep up cent by cent—I felt that I could do better with the money than he could, and wrote him so—a little less bluntly than that—asking that $300 be sent me as soon as possible, the rest to remain in his hands. With $300 I could still get 3,000 shares, but if I had bought in when it was three cents my $300 would have got me 10,000 shares. I had lost that much by waiting.

"I had a letter of remonstrance from Judge Haliday, but I had written rather peremptorily and he ended his letter by saying that while it was not in accordance with his judgment he would forward to me the amount asked for the day I was twenty-one. I knew I could

depend absolutely upon his doing it. My birthday was on the 17th, and when the 22d came I knew I should have the letter, allowing five days from New York, one more than it often took. In those five long days of waiting *Golden Queen* had been steadily going up. By the 22d it was fifteen cents, and $300 would now get me only 2,000 shares. Doctor, I wish I could make you understand the feverishness of anxiety with which I waited for that letter! There were rumours of a strike up at *Golden Queen* and——"

"A labour strike?"

"Oh, no! They had struck ore—had found the lead, you know."

"Yes, yes. . . . The lead.—I see."

"I went out to lunch at twelve o'clock. The Stock Exchange closes at one. In the restaurant I met Jones, who called me over to his table. He was the one, you know, who had just made $200 on *Golden Queen* over night. He was a kind-hearted fellow and he gave me a straight tip. *Golden Queen* had struck it rich! Its stock was soaring! . . . Well, to a young fellow of twenty-one another young fellow a few years older, who has just cleaned up $200 in a day and has a straight tip about a bigger thing is worth listening to. I listened to Jones if I didn't to Judge Haliday.

"When I went out on the street I was simply crazy. Jones's 'tip' had gone to my head. I had got nearly to Second South, where the Exchange is, before I remembered that if I bought the stock I wouldn't have the money to pay for it—yet. I slowed up at that and turned back toward the bank, thinking fast. At the bank door I stopped and took out my watch. It lacked fifteen minutes of one. I shut the watch thinking, I remember, that if I hadn't paid $300 for it in Geneva I would have had that money now to operate in stocks with! . . . Think of it! Three hundred dollars *to operate in stocks with!* . . . I went to the nearest

pay telephone, shut myself in, and called up Jones's broker. Could he get me some *Golden Queen?*

Not to-day. *Golden Queen* was passed. They were down to *Lower Mammoth* now.

What did *Golden Queen* close at?

Twenty-nine and a half. It had gone up with a rush to-day. Rumour of a strike. Anything else? *Northern Light* was a good buy.

No, I didn't want *Northern Light.* Then a thought struck me. Could he get it on the curb?

Probably. He would try. (The "curb" was Greek to Dr. Dabney, but he did not interrupt.)

"For one moment I hesitated. It flashed over me even then that I hadn't the money, but with it came the devil's suggestion, 'You will have by the time the stock is delivered, *dead sure!* And if you wait, the stock will be beyond you.'

"You know how the danger of a thing's slipping away from you settles your mind that you must have it at all costs. I gave the order—one thousand shares of *Golden Queen* at thirty cents—no higher. For even in that insane moment I remembered that $300 was my limit.

"Then I went back to the bank and waited for the three o'clock mail. *The letter didn't come!* . . . Another day and it didn't come! . . . though the stock did and *was paid for!* . . . Another, and it didn't come. *But the bank examiner did!*

"Dr. Dabney, if there is any blacker, deeper hell than I was in for that forty-eight hours, don't ever preach it! . . . It was enough!

"At the close of the second day I was called into the president's room. The cashier and the bank examiner were there. The thing was palpable. I didn't know enough about it to cover my tracks. When I left that room I had confessed all and was under arrest—for embezzlement!"

"Couldn't it have been arranged in some way?" protested the minister.

"It could have been arranged, of course. Those things are settled outside of court every day in the year, I suppose, somewhere. But it takes money or influence to do it, and I had neither."

"Did the letter never come?"

"Yes. The very next day after my arrest. It had been delayed three days by a washout! . . . You would hardly call that a special providence, I suppose?"

His tone was hard and bitter, and Dr. Dabney could only shake his head sorrowfully.

"My counsel took the money to the directors, making restitution, and entreating them to withdraw the complaint,—pleading my youth, the temptation, everything that could be brought forward as an extenuating circumstance. It was no use! . . . The very arguments he brought forward they turned against him. It *was* a temptation, they admitted, a strong temptation; but it was one that in the very nature of the case would exist so long as mining operations were carried on in the State, and an example must be made of those who fell before it which would deter other young men. I believe there had been another case a while before and they had let him off. I think there were several of them that would have been glad to do the same for me, but the majority ruled. . . . I suppose they were right—theoretically; society must be protected; and when you want an example it is easier to lay hands on a bungling boy than a robber entrenched behind a corporation. . . . Oh, well! I don't mean to put up a pitiful mouth. I got what was coming to me, I suppose. But I've sometimes thought I got what was coming to the other fellow too."

"Archer," Dr. Dabney bent forward in his chair, and McLain could see that he shook as with an ague, "what —what was the result?"

"Ah-h-h, they got me, doctor! They got me! . . . You see, the lawyer that defended me was a young fellow too—he did the best he could—but he didn't know how to work it; and then having no friends near me I was without moral support at the trial. . . . Yes, they made short work of it. Before I had recovered from the frantic bewilderment of it I had been tried—convicted—sentenced—and was at hard labour in the Utah State Prison."

The old minister sank back in his chair with a groan. He had hoped against hope to be spared this.

XXV

THE SITUATION OUTLINED

McLAIN got up abruptly and walked to the end of the porch looking out toward the orchard. The sight of that crumpled up, broken old man was more than he could endure. . . . But he must go on. Time was slipping away and there was much to do yet. He glanced at his watch and went back to his seat. Dr. Dabney looked up with a pathetic attempt at a smile.

"It took me unawares, Archer," he said in gentle apology. "I had thought—I had thought you would get off."

"No, sir. It is in the story-books they get off—the little fellows like me. In real life you pay up every time unless you have influential friends—or have gone in deep! . . . Well-l,—I don't know—perhaps it was right. . . . But I was so young, doctor! I was so *young!* . . . And then, while I had had what they call 'advantages,' they hadn't fitted me to cope with the world. I knew Latin and Greek fairly well; and the cathedrals by heart; I had come unscathed through Monte Carlo and Paris, and I thought I knew life and how to stand up against it. *But I didn't know its inexorableness!* . . . Dr. Dabney, why don't they tell us beforehand what we are to meet?"

"They do, my boy! They do! . . . But you don't listen!"

McLain pondered.

"I guess that's right."

"Archer, was—was your sentence severe?"

"No, it is what is called a 'light sentence.' It was for a year. But, Dr. Dabney, for men of my kind there is no 'light sentence.' This was a short one, but"—his clenched hand beat the air—"it was long enough to brand me for the rest of my life!" His voice shook. "And with precisely the same brand as that thought fit for the assassin, the highway robber, or—worse. . . . Oh, it is a blundering justice that can't make nicer discriminations than that! . . . But I must get on with this story. It isn't necessary to go into detail about the prison life. I have no complaint to make. They treated us as well as they could. I never had to put on stripes until——"

The narrative came to an abrupt stop. A strange change came over the face of the man. It stiffened with some pent-up emotion. When at last he looked up there was in his eyes a look of dumb misery that one sees sometimes in an animal in pain. Dr. Dabney involuntarily laid his hand on McLain's knee. There was a curious deadness in his tone when he spoke again.

"When I had been in about three months news came to me of my mother's death. I knew then that I ought to be in for life—for I had killed her! For those three months I had lived on her letters and the thought that some day I should see her and be able to make her understand. But now—well, there seemed nothing more to try for. I don't remember just how it happened but while I was in the first blackness of it a guard spoke roughly to me one day and ordered me to do something. I think I turned on him and cursed him—refused perhaps,—I don't remember about it very clearly—but I do remember that he reported me as insubordinate, and I was put in stripes. They reserved that for a punishment. The next day I was set to work breaking rock. It seemed to me intolerably hard that I should be degraded thus at such a time; but then the man knew nothing about the letter.

"Well, one morning the road gang started out in charge of two 'trusties' and a guard. Among us was a man—a devil-may-care fellow named Mulnix, who was finishing a third term,—was so near through it, in fact, that nobody would have dreamed of his doing so idiotic a thing as to try to escape. But one can never tell what impulse a desperate man will follow. The guard had been standing near where Mulnix and I worked, side by side. As he turned away Mulnix dropped his hammer, caught the guard by the leg, and tripped him. His gun was discharged as he went down, wounding one of the prisoners, I learned afterwards. In that second all was in confusion, with Mulnix speeding down the road and I after him."

"To catch him?"

"No! To escape! The impulse had come over me as irresistibly as it had come over Mulnix, I suppose. Certainly, nothing was farther from my thoughts than making a dash for liberty one minute before I did it, but when I saw the guard down, the men in confusion, the road before me, and the canyon just beyond, a wild, mad impulse to run came upon me with overmastering force—and I obeyed it. You know I told you I was the sprinter of our team at college. I suppose that had something to do with it, for as a boy I could never see a straight stretch of road without wanting to try it.

"It seems when he got to his feet the guard thought I was trying to catch Mulnix, and as I was between them he did not fire. When I passed him, they knew of course that it was liberty I was after and they fired. The ball did not strike me and I had no time to see what it had done to the other man. In a moment I had dashed into a bend of the canyon and was out of rifle range.

"That canyon is a much travelled one, and I knew I was likely to run into somebody at any turn, but I also knew that the one important thing was to get dis-

tance between me and my pursuers, and I risked the other danger and ran on and on and on. Never in my best day had I run as I did then, for this time there was a goal worth striving for. The canyon narrowed; its walls grew more precipitous; the road ran first on one side and then on the other of the stream; I could see glimpses now and then of the dugway far up above me on my right."

"The dugway?" questioned Dr. Dabney.

"Yes. The road dug from the mountain side. Almost every canyon of the size of this has such a road. When I had gone a little farther the canyon forked, and I had to decide between the main road, where I could still make good time, the North Fork, which was more precipitous but far less frequented, and the dugway. The choice really was between the first two, for the dugway was too much of a highway for my present garb. As I stood resting and weighing the dangers of the two, I heard the sound of horses' hoofs in front of me, and I looked about for a hiding place.

"A little way above me was an immense boulder that probably had been blasted from the dugway and lodged here. I made instantly for it and had just crouched behind it when a dog trotted into view, followed by two or three Ute Indians,—a man, a woman with a baby strapped to her back, and a boy, as I could see by peeping. Evidently they had not seen me, but the thing gave me such a fright that I decided upon the North Fork with its risk of starvation. I was coming to see every minute more clearly the impossibility of escape in these cursed prison clothes. If I only had citizen's clothes I would defy hunger, for I was familiar with the story of how the Sego Lily had become Utah's State flower by virtue of having saved her people alive in a 'starving time.'

"Dr. Dabney, I shouldn't expect you to believe what happened to me next if it were not that you must know I

would not lie to you to-day, whatever I may have done in the past. Call it luck, providence, a devil's chance, as you will (and sometimes since I have thought it was the latter), but as I got up and crept around the boulder to take up my way to the North Fork I came plump upon the body of a dead man! It was just below a crumbled place in the dugway above us and a trailing path of gravel and stones that had followed him down showed how he had fallen. A broken bottle told why. There was a gash on his temple where he had struck the sharp edge of the boulder.

"But it was not the man or his fate that appealed to me then. A dead man in a canyon is not a rare thing in Utah. They are found there if anywhere. I did not give a second look at his face. I saw nothing but his clothes. I can almost feel at this moment the swift suffocating rush of feeling that overwhelmed me at the thought of what those clothes meant to me—me, a convict, clad in tell-tale stripes! Do you see? They meant liberty! I can feel now the eager haste with which I stripped them from the poor wretch and put them on myself. It was the instinct of self-preservation at first—a mad desire to be rid of these accursed stripes and clothed in garments that would let me slink unchallenged through the mountain passes and out into the world; but as I stood ready to go and looked at the hated garments I had cast aside quite another thought came to me. *I would put them on the dead man and leave myself there in the canyon!* Perhaps he would not be found until identification was impossible.

"To think was to act. I put upon the helpless wretch the badge of my own shame. As I was finishing I heard a stealthy step and turned quickly to see Mulnix stealing toward me with an upraised club. I knew then that it was my life or his, for I could see in his face that he too knew the clothes I wore meant liberty to the one that got them. I waited without seeming to

"I KNOW I HAVE CLIMBED THAT CLIFF ONE HUNDRED TIMES SINCE IN DREAMS"

know that he was there until he was almost upon me, when turning suddenly I struck him with all my force on the jaw—a stroke I had learned at college. He dropped like an ox, and I left him, not knowing whether he were dead or alive. I never knew until I learned from Judd when he was here last winter."

"Judd!" thought Dr. Dabney, with a start; but he did not interrupt the story.

"Well, I immediately abandoned all thought of the North Fork. Being now in citizen's clothes, the thing for me to do was obviously to take the quickest road out of the country if I could gain it. That road I knew was the dugway. How I got up to it I can't tell you. If anybody should say it was impossible I would hardly dispute it. But behind me was a man who might rise up at any moment—and if he did I knew it would be with murder in his arm—I would not escape him a second time—and beyond me was freedom. That conviction hardened my muscles to superhuman strength. If ever I appreciated the value of athletic training it was then. . . . I know I have climbed that cliff one hundred times since in dreams!

"At last I was on the road above—the travelled road where now I might meet any man and pass unnoted, save as in that sparsely settled region a man is always observed by every person he passes. Then I sat down to rest, for I was well spent. As I sat there wondering what the next move would be I heard the sound of horses' feet coming toward me from the east, and before I could decide what to do the rumble of a wagon from the west, which was the direction of the city. This was nearer to me evidently than the other, though the wagon was hidden by a ledge of rock from which the roadbed had been blasted. These dugways are frightfully narrow in places and are seldom wide enough for two wagons to pass except at the switches—as the occasional widened out places designed for this purpose are called.

Before a man passes a jutting ledge like this he must stop and reconnoitre, for if he neglects it and they meet there somebody has to back up to the next switch. Well, I did not wish to be observed sitting here, so I went back toward the nearer wagon, the one from the west, and told the man (evidently a sheep-herder, from his wagon) that I had come to tell him another vehicle was between him and the switch and he'd better wait. He was grateful for the trouble I had taken, and offered me a lift if I were going his way. I *was* going his way whithersoever it led me, for his back was turned on Salt Lake. So when the man we were waiting for passed us we were two sheep-herders seated in our wagon, and were so reported if we were reported at all.

"I rode with that man many miles, as much to his satisfaction as to mine, apparently, for a sheep-herder's life is a lonely one, and he seemed glad of an hour's companionship with human kind. Do you remember my describing a sheep-herder's wagon to you and Mr. Cartwright once, doctor? . . . This was the one, and the only one I was ever in; but if my acquaintance was not extensive it was intimate, for I lived in that wagon four long months. It all came about in the most natural way possible. The man wanted a herder—his had gone home sick—and when he found that I was out of work he offered me the job. I took it without a moment's hesitation, for it meant food, shelter, and security for me up in those lonely mountains. Sorensen—that was the man's name—left me after he had properly instructed me and convinced himself that I was trustworthy, and I lived four months with the sheep and the sagebrush and the Book of Mormon. The man was a Latter Day Saint and left me that. Do you remember my telling you once that I had been employed by a Mormon? . . . This was the man.

"In the late fall we came down into the valley, the sheep so steeped in sagebrush that you could scent them

a city block. Bah! I can smell it now! . . . I didn't accompany Mr. Sorensen to the valley, for that was the last place I wanted to be. I told him I was going over into the Uintah country, and then when he had paid me off I skirted Uintah and pressed on to Wyoming, and later into Colorado, and well, about everywhere, I guess, and finally down into old Mexico. I will not weary you with details, doctor. It is sufficient to say that for three years I was a fugitive and a vagabond, seeking rest and finding none, for before me was always the terrifying dread of recapture.

"I found positions of different kinds, but I never kept them. Some chance word, or glance—covert as I always thought it—would be sufficient to throw me into a transport of terror, and I would throw up the whole thing and leave between suns. Doctor, this is the kind of thing that drives men mad! and when at last I found myself looking behind me to see if anybody was there, I made up my mind that I should work on down into Mexico. It was in Chihuahua that I succeeded in establishing relations with Judge Haliday. He sent me money and kept my secret, for he was a devoted friend of my family. If I had listened to his counsels I should not be telling you this shameful story to-day. From that time on I did not have to work my way, but travelled as any tourist doing Mexico might travel. You know I told you that at my mother's death my stepfather's property came to me. It had increased greatly by the rise of lots, and there was ample now. But"—he shook his head.

"There was one thing I had not counted upon. That was the fact that other people were doing Mexico too. One day at a bullfight in the City of Mexico I saw a man I had known in Salt Lake. He was absorbed in the arena, and I am sure had not seen me, but I slipped out of my seat and was on my way out of Mexico within an hour. This continent is pretty large; but it is a

place of easy transportation, and we are a nation of travellers. Perhaps a man might hope to lose himself in some parts of Europe,—but not in America. . . . Still, I made up my mind to try it in the Canadian wilds of Saskatchewan, and I was on my way thither when this railroad wreck threw me into this community. Of my life here you know."

The voice ceased, but there came to him no word either of reproach or sympathy. He went on more hurriedly:

"This, then, is what I am: a fugitive—not from justice (even at this hour I protest that it was not just to brand a boy with a criminal's mark for so slight a sin)—but from the law. As to grosser sins——"

The old minister, sore-stricken already, raised a protesting hand.

"Don't stop me!" McLain cried, vehemently. "I mean to lay my soul bare to you now, as before God. This is the last time I shall ever look in your face, Dr. Dabney, and I will not leave myself either worse or better than I am.—Of gross sins I am innocent. I claim no merit for it. I have come of generations of men who have held their appetites in leash. My temptations did not lie that way. Had they done so I probably would have gone down before them, for I have shown myself pitifully weak."

Again he stopped as if gathering strength. When he spoke again it was with all vehemence subdued and only pleading in his voice.

"It would be impossible to make you understand, Dr. Dabney, what those blessed months of convalescence in your peaceful, godly home meant to me. For years I had been in a maelstrom;—this was a quiet stream with scarce a ripple on its surface. Is it strange that I ceased struggling and drifted with the current? Here I could stop thinking until I was strong enough to get a firmer grip on things;—and when that time came I found that

things had got a grip on me. I am afraid I didn't try very hard at first. It was so blessed to have human companionship—and such companionship!

"There was a feeling of security here that I had never had for one moment in all those years of wandering. I dreaded unspeakably to go out in the world again. But I knew I must go on with my Canadian project or map out a new course of action. Then the thought came to me: Why shouldn't I stay and make good here? Tinkling Spring was off the line of travel. I could be as much lost here as in Saskatchewan. Who would ever find John Branham, the embezzler, in Archer McLain, plain farmer of Tinkling Spring? The thought was seductive.

"But, doctor, do you want to know what first put the thought into my mind that I might succeed in this thing? It was something you read one night at prayers:

"'If the wicked restore the pledge,' it went, 'give again that he hath robbed, walk in the statutes of life without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die.'

"I listened in amazement, saying to myself: 'This is what I have done; I have restored, I have walked uprightly in the statutes of life so far as I have known them; it is only that one black spot that I cannot rid myself of.' And then, Doctor Dabney, you read on almost as if in answer to that cry of my soul:

"'None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him; he hath done that which is right; he shall surely live.'"

Dr. Dabney reached out instinctively toward the Bible that lay on the table.

"I have it right, doctor! I'll never forget those two verses. I lived with them for a month. I looked it up and said it over to myself until I actually believed it. But it won't do, doctor! It won't do! It sounds well, but it is not true. It may have been under the Mosaic

Law, but not in the Christian dispensation! No, no! It ought to read:

"'Let a man restore the pledge, pay back that he hath robbed, walk uprightly all the rest of his days,—and it shall profit him *nothing*. The transgression of his youth shall be remembered against him *forever*. He may live, but he would better die.'"

The minister shook his head sorrowfully. But could he gainsay it?

"As I say, the thought of losing myself here was seductive, but it was not that alone—I *will* do justice to myself. It was as much a consuming desire to try it again, to build up a worthy life, such as my father's son ought to have lived; to test it and see if it could be done. So, when the opportunity came without seeking on my part for me to cast in my lot with you people here by the purchase of a home, and you urged me to do it—taking the view that it was a leading of Providence—and my heart urged me more insistently even than you did; and I looked into Jean's eyes and thought I saw urging there too,—I—well, I gave up and stayed. For I had grown to feel that a simple, honest, God-fearing life of daily toil, such as your people lived, would be of all things the most desirable, the most blessed. I believed that I could enter such a life and begin again.

"And it seemed to me that I had a right to begin again. My sin had not been a heinous one. Its punishment had been altogether disproportionate to the offence. If it had not been for the accident of a delayed letter it would never have been known as sin at all—simply an indiscretion. If that letter had come on time I would have stood before the world an upright, honourable man—and I should have been *exactly the same man I am to-day too!* Will you think of that?

"And even granting that it was a sin—I had paid! surely I had paid! And having paid, I argued with

my conscience, I was entitled to another life—a life with some joy in it."

"And—you didn't happen to think of Jean," said the minister, slowly, "and how this thing that you were planning might take all the joy *out* of life for her?"

"*Oh-h!* Doctor Dabney!" groaned the tortured man, dropping his head into his hands in an attitude suggesting despair. "I deserve that—but it's *hard!*"

Then he lifted his head and looked into the minister's face. "I did think of Jean. For a time I thought of nothing else. At first it seemed monstrous to think of allowing her to link her pure life with mine—a criminal's. Do you recall those moody times I used to have during my convalescence which gave Dr. Llewellyn so much uneasiness? He thought they might be caused by that blow on my head. They were not! That was not a trouble of the brain but of the heart. Conscience was struggling with desire. Again and again I have opened my lips to speak—to tell you all—and then have bitten off the words that were on my very tongue. And more often than you would perhaps believe have I come over here hoping to see you alone, and have seen Jean instead, and been overcome by temptation once more, and gone home with the truth untold.

"Doctor, do you remember my coming to you in the cemetery after Zeb Horn's burial, and asking you to let me have a talk with you? . . . You were very weary that day, and you asked me gently to excuse you from an interview just then unless—it was about my soul's salvation. Was it that? . . . No, I told you, it was not that. And I went away with the tale again untold. But I have wondered sometimes since if it did not closely pertain to my soul's salvation, for that was the turning point. I had dallied with this temptation until it was too strong for me, but that day I was nerved to throttle it. The story of Zeb Horn had moved me tremendously. I saw in his life a forecast of what I might

expect—I could never get away from this thing—I might as well give it up now—and the first step, the thing that would make it irrevocable, would be to tell my story to you. . . . Doctor, on what small things momentous issues hang! You could not hear me that day, the moment passed, and my resolution with it.

"You know how a thought changes in its aspect from long dwelling upon it? You know too they say it is our first view of any action that gives us our truest conception of it. I don't pretend to know about that, but I do know that in time I came to believe that if I were going to put my life behind me it was not required of me to render an account of it to any man. I loved Jean and felt sure I could make her happy"—poor Dr. Dabney shook his head—"and why should I blast her happiness as I must by telling? Thus I reasoned. . . . But it was sophistry. I ought to have known that no worthy life could be built on the foundations of a lie. . . . And yet,—oh, of course that is no excuse, but—how many men do you suppose tell the women they marry quite all their past?—and their past may have been blacker than mine too!

"Yes, it was sophistry, and it did not deceive even myself, for I knew when I confronted my own soul, unclothed, that the reason I did not tell was not the fear of her happiness but my own. I was afraid to tell! Afraid that it would part us; and by this time I felt that I could not give her up; for, Dr. Dabney, with all the strength of my starved, wretched soul—I loved her."

Perhaps there was some reverberating echo of this cry in the old minister's soul—echoes of a time when heart and reason struggled for mastery—when reason said, "She is not meant for a life like yours,"—and passion answered, "She is mine! She is mine!" Ah, if this were only a question of expediency as that was! He could not help seeing that his case was very, very

different, but still those echoes had a language of their own, and they spoke for the man before him.

"And, Doctor Dabney," he pleaded, "can you not see how she came to stand for all that was sweet and pure and holy in life for me—the embodiment of all I hoped to attain, the antithesis of what I wanted to put behind me? If I gave her up it seemed to me that I would be giving up all. Can you not see?"

"I can see, I can see," admitted the minister, shaking his head in sorrowful comprehension. "But, Archer, since this has been so long untold, why should you reveal it now?"

McLain looked at him a moment without speaking, realizing that the worst was yet to come. Then he drew a letter from his pocket.

"I have here a letter from Calvin Judd," he said, "which seems to make it imperative."

"Was Calvin Judd a party to this deception?" Dr. Dabney demanded, sternly.

"A very reluctant party to it—yes."

"Had you known Mr. Judd before you met him at my house?"

"Yes, sir. He was the officer that apprehended me and after my conviction took me to prison."

"Is it possible? He did not appear to recognize you."

"Oh, he recognized me! And he grilled me most unmercifully before your very eyes."

"He did? . . . I was not aware of it. I thought it was a most agreeable evening."

McLain smiled grimly.

"Therein lay the refinement of his cruelty. Yes, sir! Mr. Judd took me up bodily and held me over the brink of the pit several times through that agreeable evening. That you did not know it seemed the wonder of wonders to me. I supposed, of course, he had come to arrest me."

"And he had not?"

"No, our meeting was purely accidental. Dr. Dabney, if I had not come into the house that night life might have been materially different for all of us, for this story would never have been told. Judd would not have known that I was in the country and——"

"I think I told him about you."

"Yes, you did. And so did his father. But who would have found John Branham in Archer McLain? . . . No, his coming had nothing to do with me whatever. He had come back to see his father. Well, when I found out that this was so and particularly when I learned from him that he was then out of office, I pleaded for my chance, doctor. I lay down at his feet and begged as a dog begs to escape the lash!"

"And he agreed to it?"

"He agreed to it on one condition: that I should give up all thought of Jean. He had seen us together that evening and guessed how it might be. He said he would not have his old friend's child entangled innocently with a criminal. I was desperate and I promised. I ought to have gone away then—but I couldn't! I simply couldn't! I had bought the place, you know, and in a way that held me, and then I felt that I would rather be near her even if I couldn't have her. I thought I would be strong enough for that—but I was not. I found myself weaker than I had thought. After a few months of this I wrote Judd that I would be bound by my promise no longer—that I was going to marry her if I could—and that if necessary I should tell her all and throw myself upon her mercy. Then I asked him to tell me plainly what he proposed to do. That letter precipitated his second visit."

"I remember that he asked me many questions," murmured the minister; "your standing in the community; how I myself esteemed you; what William Llewellyn thought of you; I remember it all. And this was what it meant! He told me that he had taken a

fancy to you and was thinking of taking you into partnership with him in some scheme he had on foot. I knew you had some money to invest, and while the risk would be yours, I thought it was but natural that he should want to know the character of man you were. . . . And that was it! . . . Well, well!"

"And do you remember that he put a hypothetical question to you once—not in connection with me at all—about a man he had known in the West who had broken jail, and about his coming across him years afterwards—about how he believed the man was in earnest in his determination to lead a different life—about how he was esteemed by his fellow-townsmen, etc., etc., even his pastor,—and then demanded to know of you what was his duty in the case—to denounce or to condone? Do you remember that?"

"I do, I do. It made a deep impression upon me, for Calvin seemed greatly troubled about his responsibility in the matter, more than I could quite understand."

"Do you remember what you told him?"

"Not my exact words, but——"

"I can give them to you. You said, 'Calvin, if the man is truly penitent leave him to the Almighty. He will find him, and will deal with him.'"

"I remember it," murmured the minister. "How little I dreamed I was deciding my own child's destiny! . . . 'For every idle word' we shall be called into judgment! . . . For every idle word! . . . My own dear child!"

"It makes a difference, doesn't it?" said McLain, with a touch of bitterness that was not unnatural perhaps. "Well, it was that advice that turned the scale. Judd said to me when he told me of it, 'The doctor knows better than I do about ethical questions. Acting on his advice I am going to turn you over to the Almighty.' And in the recklessness of my joy and belief, I said to him, 'Only keep your hands off, Judd, and I'll risk the

Almighty!' . . . But He found me, doctor! . . . And He has dealt with me!"

He handed the letter to the minister, who held out a shaking hand, for the young man's solemnity had raised new forebodings. "This letter makes plain the whole situation which the long story I have been telling leads up to."

"Will you read it to me, Archer?" the minister said after glancing at it. "My sight is poor to-day."

McLain took the letter and read with unfaltering voice. When he stopped, a silence fell upon them. It was broken at last by Dr. Dabney.

"When did you get this letter, Archer?"

"Last night, after I left here."

"Ah! Then you have had time to think it over—carefully." The word "prayerfully" came to his lips from long habit, but he changed it. "And you have come to ask me——"

"No, doctor. I have not come for advice to-day. This is the kind of thing a man has to decide for himself. I have come to tell you—that"—again in the man's eyes was that look of dumb animal pain that had been there once before that day—"that I give up all thought of Jean—forever. And—I am going to give myself up."

The stillness that fell upon them then was to the outer ear like that of the grave; to the inner, it was a silence in which pulsing waves of speech beat upon them.

"Does the letter make it clear to you why I must do this, doctor?" McLain asked gently at last; for the old minister looked almost stunned, so rapidly had the story moved, and so overwhelming had been its conclusion. "You see, the man is in the penitentiary for life unless I give myself up. Of course I have thought of writing to Judd and authorizing him to tell all he knows and try to effect the man's release—I in the meantime quietly leaving the country for Canada as I had before intended doing. But I doubt if this would secure the man's par-

don. And beside, it would in a way involve Judd. I should be sorry to do that; he has tried to help me. And even supposing I could get off to Canada—I hadn't served out my time, you know—it would make me a fugitive the rest of my life. I can't go back to that! I would rather face the thing and have it over. It will set Mulnix free, at any rate."

Poor Dr. Dabney! All his life long he had talked with men of sin, a transgression of the law of God, and its cure; but when it came to a transgression of the law of man and the means of extrication from the labyrinth in which the criminal finds himself, he was dumb. He could only fall back upon the weapons of the armory he knew best.

"'Greater love hath no man than this,'" he murmured, "'that a man lay down his life for his friends.'"

"My friend!" cried McLain, with contempt. "Do you suppose a creature like this is my friend? . . . Why, I loathe the man! He is low and vicious and depraved. He is not worth saving. If he goes free he will be back inside of a year. There is no doubt of it whatever. He has served three terms, and criminologists tell us that after the second most men are hopeless. . . . Oh, I've been over all that, doctor!" A sorrowful shake of the head indicated the impotence of this line of argument. "He is an ordained criminal if ever there was one. And *yet*——"

He struck his knee with a clenched hand.

"Brutish as he is,—double-dyed criminal though he may be—and innocent as I am of putting him there—the thing resolves itself always into this: Can I see this man thrust back into hell, just as he has crawled out, and by my silence *hold* him there—to save myself? . . . Well, I can't do it! . . . That's all there is to it. I want to! . . . Oh, I *want* to! But—I *can not* do it."

Then his lips curved in a smile in which there was no mirth.

"But don't think it is love to my fellow-man—or benevolence—or any generous feeling that impels me to go back. . . . No, no! . . . It is nothing but a cold—hard—unyielding sense of justice that will not compromise."

It was Dr. Dabney's voice that broke the silence.

"God has many ways of revealing Himself, my son. Justice is one of His attributes."

Again McLain smiled. "As I see it in myself it does not seem exactly God-like,—but I can't get away from it, just the same. . . . But enough of myself. You have the whole miserable story now, and know why I have to go."

He stopped, but it was plain that he was but gathering strength to go on. He took up the Prayer Book absently and it fell open at a mark put in at the marriage service, seeing which, he closed the book hastily.

"Of course—though I can hardly expect you to believe this"—he was still smarting under the lash of Dr. Dabney's quiet words, "You didn't happen to think of Jean?" and he chose his own with painful deliberation, as one picks his way over a dangerous pass,—"my first thought, as it will be my last, was of Jean and the effect this will have on her life."

"Ah-h, Jean!" groaned the old man. "Jean! . . . 'Her house is left unto her desolate.'"

McLain gripped the arms of his chair.

"That is the bitterest drop wrung out to me to-day, Dr. Dabney. God knows I never meant to do her the bitter wrong I've done. I meant to love and cherish and protect her so long as I lived. And instead, I have brought ruin upon her and sorrow and disgrace to you both."

"Don't think of me, my son. I am old and—world-weary. My span is almost over. But Jean—with life before her. . . . ah-h!"

He did not mean to be cruel, this gentle, tender-

hearted old man—but he was sore-stricken. Jean was his one ewe lamb! Every faltering word wrung from him, every sigh forced back almost before it was breathed, was a knife to McLain.

"Dr. Dabney, if I could only blot myself out of her life and leave her the joyous, care-free girl she was before an evil chance flung me into it—I think I could take up Mulnix's sentence almost with joy. But—I can't do it!"

He stretched out his clenched hands and let them drop with a despairing gesture, repeating in a hoarse whisper: "God! . . . God! . . . I can't—*do* it!"

"No," said the solemn voice, "only God can blot out sin, and not even He can rid us of its consequences. Vicarious suffering! . . . Ah, how it runs through the world! The innocent for the guilty! . . . Jean!—my little Jean!" After a time he asked with some hesitation, "Shall you try to see her, Archer?"

The young man shook his head without looking up.

"No, I think not. It would be hard on her, and——"

Dr. Dabney tried to keep the relief out of his voice as he answered, "Perhaps you are right. We will shield her all we can—now."

McLain felt the sting of the qualifying word.

"Yes. You are right—it is late to begin. Doctor—I know you will tell it all to her gently, but—try to soften it as much as you can, won't you? . . . And then—tell her . . . tell her from me . . . that——"

"I will," the minister said, laying his hand compassionately on the bowed head.

Poor old gentleman! The waters were surging about him too. With Jean's poor bark torn from its moorings and cruelly swamped;—with Archer whom he loved as a son drifting out without chart or compass into unfathomable seas, never to be so much as sighted again;—with the wreckage of the storm floating about him whithersoever he turned—shattered ideals, broken faith,

confidence betrayed, blighted hopes, purposes overturned, —it is small wonder that the very ground seemed crumbling beneath his feet. The world was rocking around him—and there was nothing to hold to. Nothing—but the Rock of Ages!

"Archer, would you mind a word of prayer?"

McLain shook his head.

The old minister knelt down beside the man who had destroyed his home, a shaking hand laid on his knee, his white locks touching the brown, and prayed—pleading with God "as a man pleadeth for his neighbour."

When he had finished, they rose together, McLain quite master of himself again.

"Thank you, doctor! I shall not forget that. There are two or three things I want to speak to you about, and then I must be going. . . . Yes, to-night. After I start I shall telegraph Judd to meet me in Salt Lake—I don't care to do that here—he will know better than I just what I am to do. I wanted to speak to you about Jean's furniture—the mahogany, you know, that was her mother's."

"Yes, yes. I had forgotten about it."

"It can come back at any time you wish. It was foolish, I suppose, to have brought it over so soon, but —she wanted it done, and——"

"I will attend to it, Archer."

"Another matter. I have sent my will with some other papers to Judge Haliday, who has charge of my business in New York. I made it months ago, and there is no reason why it should be changed. I should want everything to go to Jean just the same as if—as if it had ended differently. But I should like to have the tenant house and ten acres reserved for Mrs. Debo and Sandy. That is why I speak of it. I had no time to make that change, but Jean will see that it is done if anything happens to me. They have had hard lines too, and I want to see them provided with a home. . . .

I shall leave things just as they are there for the present. Mrs. Debo will take care of the house and make what she can from the farm. I shall sell the place eventually, of course, but there is no time for that now. It will have to wait until"—his hand closed spasmodically—"until I am out."

There was an awkward pause, which Dr. Dabney broke rather tremulously. "Archer, you will let us hear from you—occasionally?"

"No-o,—I think not. . . . It's all over, doctor, and the best thing now will be for me to drop out of your lives. . . . It will make it easier for her to—get over it."

"Ah-h! I am afraid she will never quite get over it. . . . But perhaps you are right, perhaps you are right! . . . Yes. I believe you are."

"Dr. Dabney,"—the young man stood before him in proud humility—"you have been very generous to me—far more than I have deserved—and—I am going now. Would—would you be willing to shake hands with me?"

The old minister threw his arm around the young man's shoulder and grasped the outstretched hand.

"Good-bye, my son! . . . Good-bye!" He clung to him, feeling himself as well as Jean bereft—"sorrowing most of all that . . . that they should see his face no more." Then he raised his hands in tremulous benediction:

"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

As they stood thus, one with bowed head, the other with eyes raised to heaven, whence only to him could help come, a slight noise startled them, and they both looked up.

There in the doorway, with face white as the dead, but with burning eyes, stood Jean!

XXVI

A NEW FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

"GENEVIEVE! My child!"

Instinctively Dr. Dabney stepped in front of her as if to shield her. But she came straight to him and put her arm about his neck, saying quietly:

"You do not need to tell me anything, father. I have heard every word."

His arm tightened around her; but his fears were groundless; she was the strong one of the three. Dr. Dabney was greatly shaken; and at sight of her McLain had dropped back into his chair, his hand covering his eyes to shut out her accusing face. At last she knew all,—what he was, whence he had come, and the degradation to which he must go back. He set his teeth and waited. As he sat thus he felt the touch of a hand on his shoulder.

"Poor boy!" she said, compassionately. "Poor boy! And you tried to bear it all by yourself! Why, dear, what are women for if it is not to help at a time like this?"

The shoulder under her hand trembled, but he neither raised his eyes nor stirred, and she knelt down by him, taking the passive hand that lay on his knee and pressing it against her cheek, her head close to his bowed one.

"I did not mean to listen to a story that you did not want me to hear, Archer; but I had come home earlier than I expected—I didn't go to town—and I was lying on the couch right by the window, and I couldn't help hearing. At first it didn't make any difference if I did hear, and then when it did make a difference—I couldn't go! I had to hear then!

INSTINCTIVELY DR. DABNEY STEPPED IN FRONT OF HER AS IF TO SHIELD HER

"But I am glad I heard you tell all the story, Archer. Dreadful as it is, I feel now that I know the worst. I've always felt there was something you kept back, and it hurts a woman to feel that. . . . Father, don't go. All I have to say I want to say before you too. I feel now that there is nobody in the world but just us three —and God. . . . No, dear, you must never, never feel again that you have to bear it alone. We are going to help you, aren't we, father?

"And, Archer, I am glad you are going back. Of course not glad that you must go, but glad that since you know it is the right thing you are strong enough to do it. . . . And it was the only way, dear. I can see that now, just as you do. When anybody gets into the wrong path, there's nothing he can do but just get back into the right one, *at any cost,* and then go on the best he can. You had gone away into the far country, but now you are coming home. That was always our favourite story, wasn't it, father? And do you remember how happy we were when the prodigal got tired of the husks and started back? and how glad that the father ran to meet him? You used to tell me he did that because he knew it would be very hard for the poor boy to come all the way alone. . . . But Archer, dear— (Archer, *please* look at me!)—when you come back from—from that place, we'll run to meet you, and we will go to our own home, and it shall be just as we had planned."

He stood up then and caught her hands in his, holding her from him with arms that ached to enfold her, but permitting himself only to feast his eyes on the divine compassion and sweetness of her face.

"No! No! Not that, Jean! Base as I seem, I will not accept at your hands a sacrifice like that!"

"But, Archer!" She smiled up at him, the pitiful smile of lips that quiver; and he smiled back too, but

shook his head, repeating, "No! . . . No! . . . No!"

"Genevieve, my child," said Dr. Dabney, greatly agitated, "do nothing precipitate."

"But, father, this isn't precipitate. I've been thinking of it a long, long time. I'm years older than I was this morning. I am sure I'm right, father, because it was your prayer that made it all plain to me. You know you've always told me that when we come to a time of utter need we'll find God waiting for us. I don't think I ever quite understood it before, though of course I've always prayed. . . . But, father, it is true! . . . At first everything seemed so dark! so dreadful!—(Archer, don't hold me off! I want to come close to you! We never will need each other more than we do now!) . . . Yes, it was the prayer, father. I know you will be glad of that. Everything was so dark at first. It seemed to me I never never could find a way out. But when you asked God for light, He gave it to me. And when you asked Him for leading, it almost seemed to me that I could feel His hand. . . . And then, Archer dear, I just let Him guide me and He led me out of that labyrinth straight to you.

"He showed me the real man you are instead of the man you seem, because I asked Him to, and then it was made clear to me all in a moment that it doesn't really make any difference what people think about us, if only we are right,—and so the horror and the disgrace of it seemed to slip away from me. And I understood all you wanted to say—and couldn't; all you wanted father to tell me,—that you loved me and would always love me,—that you wanted me to try to forgive you, and then forget. . . . Wasn't that it? . . . And, dearest!"—she broke from him then and took his face between her hands, "I *do* forgive you. I know you never meant to harm me. But don't ask me to forget! I never can do that—for I *love* you, Archer—love you and believe

in you in spite of all. And I am going to be true to you as long as we live!"

It was not in mortal man to resist that, and he strained her to him, raining kisses on her tear-wet face.

When they thought at last of anybody but themselves, Dr. Dabney was gone—gone to plead, not for them, but for himself.

"Oh, Jean," the man cried, contritely, "I didn't mean to do it! I couldn't help it! Your face so close to me maddened me. But don't think it means I am going to let you make this sacrifice. I couldn't do that!"

"*Why,* Archer, *why,* if I want to do it? It is my life, to do with as I choose."

"Shall I tell you—plainly?"

"Yes—plainly."

"Because you do not realize—cannot realize—what it would be to link your life with that of a man who has been a convict. Ah-h! You shrink from that, even now!" For a shiver that she could not control passed through her.

"It was only because you put it so——"

"So brutally? That's true. I didn't try to soften it. But, Jean—it is the way the world will put it for the rest of the time. . . . No! I'll save you from that, at least."

They sat down on the steps then as they had sat last night when they were mapping out a different future, and talked it over long and sanely. And always at the end of every argument she brought forward was his inexorable "No! . . . No!"

"You are under excitement now, Jean," he told her again and again in varying phrase, "but the reaction is bound to come. It may come to-morrow, when you find yourself without me; or it may be weeks—months—even years—before the full force of this thing is driven in upon you. But when it is, it must not find you bound! That's what I mean."

"But, Archer," she protested, "you were the same man last night that you are to-day. You would have let me marry you then. And you had been—in prison, too."

"Oh, *Jean!*" he groaned, "don't say *that* to me! That's where the baseness of it comes in. I was the same man I am to-day—an escaped convict. And I *would* have let you marry me—because I wanted you so! . . . But *then* you didn't know! That's a man's argument, I suppose; but after all it saves a woman pain sometimes. This was my black spot to be covered up; and I planned to guard you jealously from a knowledge of it. I thought I could do it. I honestly believed I could keep it from you always, and make you happy. And," he clenched his hand, "if this cursed thing hadn't come up just as it did, I believe I could have done it. . . . But you know now! And don't you see it would be between us, always?

"Why, Jean," he said a moment later, "suppose I should let you do this thing, and then when we were married and it was irrevocable (for it would be irrevocable with a woman like you. You are not the kind to marry a man for 'better,' and then cast him off when you find it is for 'worse')—and then when it was irrevocable, I say, you should come some day to see that it was a mistake! Ah-h! you don't know what regret is! There is more in that word than most people see. You women think of it as a symbol for the amiable hypocricies of social life,—but wait till you fathom it! Stand where I stand to-day facing the black depths to which my own feet have brought me, and think back to the time when *one* step turned me away from an honourable career—and the house over yonder! . . . *Just one step!*—but it changed the direction of my whole life, and it will change the direction of yours. There has not been a time since that I wouldn't have given ten years of my life to get back one little three minutes! . . .

Ah, Jean! that's regret! . . . Well, I'm going to save you from it, little girl!"

"That day would never come for me, Archer. It is not the same at all."

"It would come! It would come!" he said. "Perhaps not at first, for a woman's love and her capacity for sacrifice will lead her into endless follies for a man; and it does seem sometimes as if there were a glamour thrown over the very sacrifice itself! But the witchery of a glamour never lasts, Jean, and when it is gone we see things as they are. . . . It seems impossible to you now that that time should ever come—but some day"—he was sitting with his arm around her, his eyes looking straight before him into space, as if he were trying to visualize some shadowy, far-off picture, and when he spoke again it was in a voice low and freighted with infinite tenderness—"some day . . . it might be—when you looked into the face of a little child—and remembered that its father had been a criminal—and the brand was on its tender flesh. . . . It would come—and come to stay."

He felt the thrill that ran through her, but she only moved imperceptibly closer to him.

"And when I saw it in your face (for I should see it—you could not hide it from me—and don't you know I should be always looking for it, always fearing it?)—when I saw it in your face I should know, from my own heart, that you were looking back to this hour, as I look back to my hour of choice, and saying to yourself as I have said one thousand times, 'Oh, *why* did I do it?'"

He shook his head. "I couldn't risk that, Jean! . . . No, no! . . . It would be tragedy for you—but for me it would be—hell! Then would be the time you would have to hide the pistol—for I should have to end it!

"But don't think it hasn't helped me, Jean,—your

sweet, unselfish willingness to make this sacrifice. It has made me strong! strong enough to put behind me the temptation it carries with it—strong enough to go back and take my punishment like a man and not a slave. Jean, Jean! you've put heart into me! To know that you 'love me and believe in me in spite of all'—I'll take that back with me, dear. If anything in God's universe could bring a man up out of the depths, it would be that."

And so, after much talk, they left it, because he would not have it otherwise. She was to be free, absolutely free, with no thought of anything between them ever in the future.

"But, Jean," he said afterwards, toying with her hand, "I want you to wear my ring always if you will—in memory of me, just as if I had died in any other way. Only—now I must say this, dear, even though it may seem unfeeling to you, in your present mood—if the time should ever come when you want to wear a ring put on your hand by another and better man than I am send this back to me without a word, and I will know. You needn't ask forgiveness then for having changed—it is all forgiven beforehand; nor spend any time in explaining how it happened. It would be awkward for you, and I would know anyway. It will happen—if it does—because it ought to happen! You ought not to go through life widowed because I die to you to-day. Some time perhaps I shall be strong enough to hope you will not—but just at this moment I am a trifle weak." He smiled down at her in the old way, and patted her cheek with a familiar movement that pierced her heart.

"I am not going through life widowed," she said, half laughing, half sobbing. "When you're—out, I'm going to be a wife!"

And again he smiled into her eyes and shook his head.

When it came to the question of severing all con-

nection even by letter she was as obdurate as he had been.

"I shall write to you as often as the rules of the prison permit. Don't tell me that I mustn't, Archer, for I will. I *will* do it! whether you want me to or not, and whether you answer my letters or not."

"Jean, do you understand the censorship of a prison? Do you know that every word you write will be read by another before it reaches me?"

"No-o, I didn't know it. I had never thought anything about it. But it doesn't make any difference to me if it is. I shall write, just the same. Why, Archer, you will *need* my letters—to help you bear it. Don't you know you will be glad to get them?"

He laughed outright at that. That weary waste stretched out before him like Sahara. Would a man dying of thirst on a parched desert be glad of water?

"I cannot truthfully say, Jean, that I shouldn't be glad to get them," he said, drily, "but I will say that it would be better for you if you did not write them. You would forget me sooner."

"I am not going to forget you. And I don't intend that you shall forget me."

"That danger is the smallest that confronts me," he said.

Indeed, a greater one was confronting them at that very moment,—the risk of such a correspondence. How should her letters be sent to him? If to plain John A. Branham, they might go astray. More specific direction would surely prove fatal to secrecy in a curious country neighbourhood. The decision was that for the present her letters should be sent under cover to Calvin Judd, who would remail them. McLain was sure of Judd's willingness to co-operate with him in anything that would secure secrecy And the more they thought of the practical side of this thing the more desirous they both became to avoid publicity.

"It isn't as it was before," she argued. "You had

no right then to ask me to share your life, and hold this back from me, for then it was a guilty secret. But now, since you have expiated (or will have when I see you again)"—she put her arms around his neck, the joy of that time already in her eyes, and her lips close to his, and he kissed her, of course,—what man would have done differently under this provocation?—"now it is *our* secret and we have a right to keep it if we choose—and if we can."

"Yes—if we can," he said, less confidently than she.

"How many persons know this?"

"Four. You, your father, Judge Haliday, and Calvin Judd. I have written to these two to-day."

"Is Judge Haliday trustworthy?"

"Absolutely. He has kept my secret for five years, and would guard my name as he would his own. He promised my mother on her deathbed that he would never reveal it."

"And Mr. Judd?"

"I have perfect confidence in Judd."

"Well, I am sure of father. And there is just one left, but that one is a woman. Do you think she could be trusted?"

"I should trust her with my soul!" he cried, passionately, straining her to him.

"Then I can see no reason why this should not be kept forever, a solemn secret known only to us four. . . . If it cannot be, we will face it together!" Her head was thrown up and her eyes shining.

"We'll try it first," he said, infected with her courage, but even at that moment remembering Zeb Horn.

Another question arose.

Not unnaturally their minds had been dwelling on the past and the future—but after all, it is the present that is the important thing, for that must be met. The past, with its weaknesses, its mistakes, its sorrows, and its sins, is cast in a mould. We cannot change it by a hair.

Futurity is in the flux, subject to the mutation of invisible forces which we may or may not control. But the present, like the poor, we have always with us; and for it we may give most humble and hearty thanks, for our to-days, which we are sometimes inclined to belittle, are the plastic material from which our yesterdays and our to-morrows are moulded.

This truth had been pressed sharply home upon McLain by his own experience, but it was presenting itself to Jean in an eminently practical aspect. What explanation was to be given of their sudden change of plans? McLain's abrupt withdrawal from the community at this time would precipitate a flood of questioning comment from which they both shrank unspeakably.

"It will be hardest for you, Jean," he said, as they talked it over, "and I cannot protect you from it."

"Yes," she admitted, with a drawing in of her breath, "it will not be easy. But, Archer, I am willing to bear part of the hardness. I am glad you don't have it all. The people I dread most are the ones I know best. I don't know what I shall say to Aunt Lavinia. I care more for her than for Aunt Josephine, even."

Well might she shrink. For if there be anything sharper than the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune it is the needle points of intimate curiosity.

"You have not told anybody you are going away?" she asked.

"Yes, I have told Mrs. Debo—that much and no more. And I have written a letter to the committee that waited on me about the nomination, saying to them that I had been called away, and that the time of my return was uncertain, but that it would probably not be until after the election."

"Who were those men, did you say?"

"Mr. Cartwright, John Bascom, and Major Davidson. I wrote the letter to John Bascom."

"Well, that will do for an announcement," she said.

"All those men have wives! And there is another thing: those women will every one of them think your going away is because you have broken with me. And when my furniture comes home, that will make it doubly sure. I don't know that we will need to make any explanation at all. Nobody will dare to ask father or me, and when they ask Aunt Lavinia (as they will) she will know nothing to tell."

"You will not tell her then?"

"Certainly not! Dear auntie! she would give it away in her efforts to keep it. . . . No, Archer, it is 'we four and no more.' You can depend on that."

Already they were feeling the strength that comes with union, and the closeness that inheres in a community of interests and dangers. Somehow, this conference about pressing practical things had knit their hearts together anew.

And so, with brave words to keep up each the other's courage, the end came and he went away.

XXVII

THEY ALSO SERVE

POOR Jean! Hers was the thorn road. If to the man in the hard schooling life was giving them had fallen the imperative of the verb "to do," to the girl had been assigned no less inexorably "to bear," in all its moods and tenses. And it is still an open question whether the active voice requires more real endurance than the passive.

When the morrow rose upon a world in which Archer McLain no longer moved, it seemed to Jean that the sun was blotted out. How could she face it? . . . Where—where, she asked herself, despairingly, was the courage that sustained her yesterday? Ah! we have all asked it in the grey of the morning!

A hundred doubts assailed her. What explanation could she make of this sudden change of plans? What should she say this very pressing moment to Aunt Lavinia? And how could she face a congregation of familiar, enquiring faces and sing?

When she went downstairs and out upon the piazza Dr. Dabney with downcast mien was pacing back and forth. He had aged ten years.

"Good-morning, father."

She spoke so cheerfully that as he met her smile the years rolled from his shoulders. She was not broken—his brave girl! He drew her tenderly to him and with his arm close about her they continued to walk up and down the piazza, reinforcing one another with unspoken sympathy.

"I have broken it to your Aunt Lavinia," he said at last, stopping at the farther end and speaking guardedly.

"I told her that something had come between you—it might be only temporary—but that you were feeling it a good deal and she'd better not say anything to you. I—I think I misled her. Indeed, I am afraid I meant to mislead her."

"Poor father!" she said. "It is hard for you to be anything but frank and open, isn't it? But don't feel troubled. You couldn't have spoken more judiciously or more truthfully. Something *has* come between us and it is only temporary."

She felt intuitively that he winced, and with that thought her strength flowed back to her.

"Shall you go to church, my daughter?"

"Yes, father. It would cause comment if I were not there. We must avoid that if possible."

"It will be hard for you."

"Yes, it will be hard for us both. We are not on an easy road now. What is your subject, father?"

"It is a strange coincidence, Genevieve, if it be a coincidence. The sermon I had prepared, and shall preach, is from the text: 'For we have not an High Priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.' I wrote it with Zeb Horn in my mind."

"'Touched with a feeling of our infirmities!' Oh, father, was it written for him?"

The church to which Dr. Dabney ministered was a social as well as religious centre. The congregation gathered early. What a metropolitan club is to its members the Tinkling Spring horse-blocks was to the assembling worshippers; and whoever conceives that gregariousness and loquacity are strictly feminine characteristics need only observe the assemblage thereabout to be disabused.

The sisters promptly repaired to the sanctuary and held

reunions there, but the brethren—always less hampered by conventions and rejoicing in greater license—lounged about the horse-blocks and in the shade of friendly oaks, discussing politics and neighbourhood happenings. Only the final unveiling of motives will reveal whether it is true piety or the social instinct that makes the rural church man so conspicuously outshine his city brother in church attendance. Perhaps the oft-asked question: "How can we get the men to church?" might be satisfactorily answered thus: "By confining them each to a ten-acre lot for the preceding six days—with the primaries coming on."

"You saw him?" demanded one of the men of Mr. Cartwright.

"We saw him."

"Did he give you an answer?"

"No, not right off. He had to think it over."

"He seemed favourable to it, did he?"

"I think so. He was to let John Bascom know his decision."

"He'll make a good representative, McLain will," said a sunburned farmer. He assumed that no man in his senses would decline such an honour.

Mr. Freno was standing modestly on the outskirts, as became a man who was socially about halfway between the creek and the prairie. "He's a man that's got a mighty kind heart," he said, reflectively, "and a heap of feelin' for them that's down."

At this moment the sound of singing was heard and the politicians repaired to their seats, having missed the invocation and the first hymn.

There was one in that congregation who had not missed it in any sense. This was Dr. Llewellyn.

He had had a call the night before to see old Mrs. Bascom, and while there had been informed by her son of the plan to put McLain forward as a candidate. Mr. Bascom had solicited his offices of persuasion, and

in accordance with a promise the doctor had stopped at McLain's for a talk with him before church time. He was met with the brief announcement from Mrs. Debo that Mr. McLain had gone away.

"Where?"

"To New York."

It is due Mrs. Debo's character for truth telling to explain that this was said in perfectly good faith. Before he went away McLain had given her a New York address (Judge Haliday's, of course) and told her to write him there if anything was needed.

"Would you rather I wouldn't say anything about your going to New York?" she had asked.

"No," he said, indifferently, though his heart had given a sudden bound, "I don't care what you say."

She was availing herself now of this permission.

To New York! When did he go?

Yesterday.

When would he be back?

He had not said.

After a moment of waiting Dr. Llewellyn realized that Drusilla was at the end of her communication, and he had gone over to the church hoping to see somebody that knew more.

The pulpit platform of the Tinkling Spring Church had been enlarged to accommodate the organ and the choir at one side. The place of the tenor was vacant. Dr. Llewellyn watched the faces of the minister and his daughter to get the clue. He knew of the approaching marriage. Was this some lovers' quarrel? . . . It occurred to him that Dr. Dabney was looking old and haggard.

"He's breaking," he said to himself with a pang. "I never noticed it so plainly before." The thought forced itself upon him still more insistently when the first hymn was read. It was David's penitential psalm.

"Show pity, Lord! O, Lord, forgive."

The old minister's trembling voice rose in an intensity of supplication that made the girl in the choir grow white with fear. Surely everybody would know who was the object of that beseeching plea!

The organ wailed out the minor strains of that old tune that nobody ever forgets, and the choir stood up, Jean with the rest. Strength came to her as she sang, for with the first word she felt that it was his prayer and she was voicing it for him. All thought of self, or her listeners was gone. Again, as last night, it was he, and she, and God.

Dr. Llewellyn drew a long breath when she stopped —his eyes had been on her alone. "I don't know! . . . I don't know!" he acknowledged to himself,—he who was so good at diagnosis, "I don't know!"

That sermon was long remembered in Tinkling Spring. It so evidently referred to Zeb Horn; and Zeb Horn had lain on their consciences for a year. The old minister's pleading had been for merciful judgment.

After the very beginning the girl in the choir had not followed the sermon. She was following, instead, the course of the man she loved. . . . Where was he now? Speeding across the prairies that stretched out interminably like his desolate life? . . . Was he looking off at the mountains and thinking of them as one more barrier between him and her? . . . Had his courage kept up, or had it ebbed away as had hers this morning? If only she could put her hand in his and strengthen him! But alone! . . . What a journey that was to take alone! . . . Was he thinking about her too? Was he wondering as he had wondered last night how she could bear it to stand before them all and sing? A ghost of a smile flitted over her face then to think how little she had thought of them. It was of him she was thinking—not of them. Last night she had written him a long letter so that he might find

one waiting for him. Surely he would need it then if ever.

The last hymn was one not much used in Tinkling Spring and it had been decided at choir practice that Jean should sing it alone. "I think that would reach me in my grave!" McLain had told her as she finished.

It was with these words beating upon her heart that Jean rose to sing. . . . Could she make it reach him in his despair?

"There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice
Which is more than liberty."

She sang it through, and with every verse the cry of her soul was the same: Could she make him hear? . . . Could she make him know?

With the last verse her face was transfigured.

"For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind."

Dr. Llewellyn drew a tense breath as she sat down. "There's something wrong!" he said to himself. "She sings like a seraph; but there's a human heart-break back of it! . . . *Where is McLain?*"

On the way home the congregation discussed the sermon and other things—principally other things. McLain's absence was not remarkable. It affected nothing but the anthem. But——

"Conscience doth make cowards of us all,"

and so, it may be said, does a secret. It had seemed to Jean's excited fears that his not being there would appear to all a fact of sinister significance, but nobody noticed it, nobody commented upon it, except the organist and the choir.

This is not entirely true. There was one exception. John Bascom had taken the mail from his box on the way to church, and seeing a letter from his prospective candidate could not resist a look at it. What he read kept him outside with Colonel Judd until Lizzie, his wife, began to grow uneasy about him. Neither he nor the Colonel heard much of that sermon, fine as it was. The one was thinking of the election; the other of the missing candidate. It gave the lonely old man a pang to think that McLain should have gone thus without a word of farewell.

"It surely can't be true that Jean Dabney is going to be married next week," said Mrs. Cartwright to her daughter as they drove home from church that day. "She wouldn't come to church the very last Sunday and stand up there and sing a solo, would she?"

"Why not?"

"Why, because it wouldn't seem hardly decent—that's why. In my day," which with Mrs. Cartwright, as with many other good persons, was always a much better day than the present, "a girl was never seen in public for three weeks before her wedding. It wouldn't have been considered proper, or delicate. I didn't go out of the house for a month, and nothing would have induced me to go to church."

"But why not?" again asked her daughter.

"Oh, because!" Mrs. Cartwright answered with finality, justly impatient at the necessity of explaining this beautiful and delicate custom to her own offspring.

At this moment John Bascom's buggy drove up beside the Cartwright surrey. After an exchange of greetings Mr. Bascom remarked, holding up a letter, "Well, we've got our answer."

"He accepts, of course?"

"No, sir. He declines."

"Declines? You don't say so! What reason does he give?"

"He's left the country."

Mr. Cartwright put the reins into his daughter's hands. "Mrs. Bascom, would you mind riding in here with my wife? I've got to talk to John."

This change effected, the three ladies settled down to an earnest discussion of the matrimonial question, which was to them more vital than politics.

"You say he's gone?" asked Mrs. Cartwright, incredulously. "For good?"

"I don't know. The letter said it was indefinite when he would return, but probably not before election."

"And election four or five months off! What do you suppose takes him off at this time?"

"The letter said, 'circumstances that he could not control.' That's all I know."

"It's a break-up between him and Jean, of course," said Mattie Cartwright, with the conviction of eighteen —an age in which romance dominates everything. "It couldn't be anything else!"

"You haven't heard anything more about it?" Lizzie Bascom was known as a prudent woman, and Mrs. Cartwright was fearful that she was holding something back.

"Well," admitted Mrs. Bascom, "I did hear Miss Lavinia say something. I was asking about Mr. McLain, not thinking there was anything wrong and she said he had gone away and that Dr. Dabney had told her that something had come between him and Jean, it might be only temporary, she said, but she'd better not say anything to Jean about it."

"I knew it!" said Mattie, triumphantly.

"Anyway, I had my suspicions that something was wrong,"—Mrs. Cartwright wished to have her own modicum of satisfaction—"when I saw Jean up there

singing. I knew it must have been postponed—or something—a girl raised as she has been!"

When Mr. Cartwright was ready to return to his family the case had been pretty thoroughly threshed over, and the result was communicated to him. He listened impatiently.

"That man had good prospects—fine prospects! Think of letting a fool thing like a quarrel with a girl blast them!"

"A *fool* thing? Why, *father!*"

"Yes, a *fool* thing!—a——" It was evident that if Mr. Cartwright hadn't been a church member he might have gone to greater lengths than this. "Now, what's going to keep Jeff Trailes from getting the nomination!"

It did not take long for the story to get around. Mrs. Cartwright took a day off, and her daughter Mattie assisted her. Mrs. Debo, who was the only person that seemed to know of McLain's destination, gave that information freely, but drew the line there.

"What was the trouble?" she was asked many times.

"I don't know," she always truthfully said.

"Well, ain't you got any opinions?" demanded Mrs. Ham, who had come up to get the news for the Creek.

"I ain't paid to hold opinions. . . . Besides, there's enough of 'em floatin' round now. . . . Yes, they taken Jean's mahogany things back, ef you must know."

That settled it.

"He's jilted her!" was the general verdict; and Jean, hearing this rumour through Miss Lavinia's distressed report, smiled, and was thankful.

"I never believed he would marry her, anyway," said one of the post-wise ones,—"a country girl like her. . . . Why, they tell me that man's been to Europe!"

XXVIII

THE STEADY PULL

THE abrupt departure of Archer McLain was a nine days' wonder. On the tenth, a scandal providentially intervened; and a scandal in Tinkling Spring was so rare an occurrence that for a time the other excitement was overshadowed. When they returned to it the first burning thirst was past. A wise man was that Oriental king who had engraved in his signet ring: "Even this shall pass away."

The McLain case came to be accepted as one of the mysteries that might never be explained. Still, there were many conjectures. Men like Mr. Cartwright and Major Davidson said it was a case of "wanderlust." McLain had been a traveller, and when that poison got to working in the blood the longing was sure to return sooner or later. They warned the young against it, which was a work of supererogation, for the youth of Tinkling Spring were just about as likely to be struck by "wanderlust" as by lightning out of a clear sky.

Others attributed it to the young man's waning interest in his farming, and told of the latent fears they had always had about it. A man had to be born and bred to it to make a real farmer. But it was a pity!

Into the discussion Dr. Llewellyn injected his theory of the injured brain, which he did not at all believe, but advanced to supply a vent for surcharged imaginings.

The general belief, particularly among the younger portion of the community, was that it was a lovers' quarrel. The truth nobody suspected.

At The Manse Jean had straightened her muscles for the bearing of her load. To meet Miss Lavinia's pity-

ing eyes each morning and have nothing to tell her; to know that wherever she went tongues were hushed upon her appearance and unloosed with her exit; to set the mahogany pieces back in their old places; to fold away the dainty *lingerie* until every drawer and closet seemed a tomb,—this was all hard. But as the days went by they brought to her a heavier burden than this, even.

The one thing upon which she rested most at first was her father's sympathy. In the few days following McLain's departure they had talked freely about him. It was her one relief to slip off to the study and with his arm around her to talk to him of her lover. But after a time, without apparent reason, the subject seemed exhausted between them. It was as it often is with a man losing by death the one nearest to him. In his first grief the name of the absent one is upon his lips as of old, and the heart feels the relief of this overflow; but after a while it somehow seems strange and unseemly to speak that name in the everyday tone; it becomes almost an offence to hear it called suddenly by another; a profanation if it be spoken with a smile, even though the sweet presence may be one that all are accustomed to think of with smiles.

So it came to be in time between these two. An inexplicable something had drifted between Jean and her father. She could not talk to him now about Archer—try as she would—with the old freedom. A deadly reticence fell upon her and upon him. They strove against it, but neither knew how to overcome it. An atmosphere, real or imagined, cannot be reasoned away. Her lover's name, spoken between them, sounded strange in her ears. Jean tried to analyze it. What was this barrier between them? How could she break it down? Her father was always tender, always kind—why could she not go to him and talk freely as she had done at first?

To the bewildered pain of it all succeeded a dim

comprehension that gradually cleared into certainty. They were looking at Archer and his release from different viewpoints,—she with hopeful expectancy and the love that "covereth all sins"; he with unspoken dread of what the return would bring.

It was hardly to be expected that he would look at this through her eyes. Love blinded her, he told himself sadly, to what was before her. She was too young to know. His heart pleaded for the boy; and yet his knowledge of life and what it had in store for her as Archer's wife made him long to draw her back from the irrevocable decision. He could not doubt what that decision would be. In fact, he realized, though he would not admit it, that the choice was already made. She was like her mother in her quiet determination. He thought much in those days of the young girl who had braved opposition—for him. . . . Perhaps if she had been here her woman's intuition might have warned her before it was too late.

It may perhaps be forgiven Dr. Dabney if he shrank a little from his daughter's marriage to Archer McLain, however full his sore heart was of pity for him. His was an unsullied name, and if this union were consummated Jean's children would be the sons and daughters of a felon. His hair whitened and his form bent under the weight of that thought. Yet never a word of censure passed his lips.

Jean recognized at last dimly the struggle that was going on within him, but while her heart ached for him she could do nothing to help.

"I love Archer," she told herself steadily, "and I shall not give him up. Father ought not to expect or wish me to do it. My mother gave up everything for him."

One night they sat at prayers, and Dr. Dabney, who read the New Testament in course, had opened to the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians.

"Brethren," he read, "if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

"Father," interrupted Jean, exercising the privilege of the house, "what does the word *restore* mean there? Is it the same as forgive?"

"No," replied her father, unwarily, "I should say it meant more than *forgive,* though it would include forgiveness. To *restore* would be—to set in his place."

"I wondered if it could mean that."

Dr. Dabney adjusted his glasses and looked at the verse again. Then with his index finger on the marginal reference he turned to the Epistle to the Romans and back to his verse; to the Hebrews and back again; to James and back; studying the connection between them with his finger still on another reference, oblivious to the present, and looking for more light.

Miss Lavinia glanced at Jean with a look that said: "Did you ever see such a man!" and took up her crocheting, which had been laid aside for prayers. The silence was unbroken, save for the turning of a page.

The close study of marginal references is to the Bible student a fascinating occupation, and it leads one into highways and byways. Paul takes him to Peter and Peter sends him back to Paul. To-night this chase had become an absorbing one. Uncle Ephraim nodded in the corner; Aunt Phyllis frankly slumbered and slept; but the search went on, while she who was the cause of it sat by, an interested observer.

A snore from Aunt Phyllis recalled Dr. Dabney to the present. He gave a startled glance around him and closed the Bible.

"Let us pray," he said, apparently under the impression that he had read a full chapter.

He made an opportunity the next day to ask Jean if she had heard lately from Archer, and to send a kindly

message to him, which made the girl's heart swell almost to bursting.

On his westward way letters had come to her every day from McLain, but afterwards it was only at stated intervals that she could hope to hear. When they came she took them down to the ravine, which somehow brought him nearer to her, and read them there where no eye could see. They were always taken out again in the security of her own locked room when all the house was asleep. She kept them under lock and key by day and cried over them by night. But the rising of the sun always found her with her "morning face" on. If there were tears over the letters she received there were none in the ones she sent back. Nothing but hope and courage and good cheer—and love—did they breathe.

McLain's replies were commonplace and seldom lengthy. He told himself that he would do nothing to make her feel that she was bound. He could not deny himself the correspondence, but his letters at least should be but friendly ones. Then if she tired of it,—if she found the situation too great a strain upon even a love like hers,—why, she knew (because he had told her so) that she could end it all at any time. Having settled his part in this cold, impersonal way, the very soul in him was kept alive by the love her letters spoke. He searched each one and weighed it in jealous scales to see if he could detect a change.

There was none. She guessed how he would feel and each time she wrote from her heart. Sometimes she felt it to be almost cruel that he did not do the same.

It had been planned that her letters should be sent under cover to Calvin Judd. But Mr. Judd was not always in the city, and besides, too many letters to one known in the neighbourhood might create suspicion.

"Jean," said her father one day, "are you sending your letters to Archer through Calvin Judd?"

"Yes, father."

"I hear the postman on this route says the reconciliation between Colonel Judd and his son must be complete, judging from the number of letters the Colonel sends him. . . . It might be well to be cautious."

Jean's next letter was sent to Mr. Arthur Pratt, Salt Lake City,—a name which meant nothing in Tinkling Spring, but was so well known in Salt Lake City that no street and number was needed. They were mailed from every available place. Everything that could be done to turn attention from her correspondent was resorted to, except the very practical expedient of lessening the amount of his mail. That was never contemplated.

Archer McLain's only other correspondent in the neighbourhood was Mrs. Debo, who wrote infrequent letters about the farm and sent them to New York. Thence they were forwarded to him. That his housekeeper, in whose care the place was left, should know of his whereabouts and be in communication with him did more to avert suspicion than any other one thing could have done. As the answers to her letters were dated New York and mailed from the same place she had every reason to suppose he was there.

The summer passed; October was painting its name on every hillside and country road; and in the ravine, close to the water's edge, with the brightest tints of all. Jean sent leaves of crimson and gold and russet browns in her letters, and McLain pinned them to his walls and dreamed his dreams of some day walking those shaded aisles with her again. One day she wrote, "This is from our chrysanthemum that we set out that day. Do you remember?" . . . Did he remember? It seemed to him that he had time since he had been back to remember everything she had ever said or done or looked since he had known her. And how the pronoun thrilled him! It was still "our" chrysanthemum.

It had been a hard summer for them all. For the family at The Manse there had been but one mitigating circumstance. Mrs. Alexander was abroad.

When the approaching marriage of her niece and Archer McLain had been communicated to her she had written Jean a wrathy letter. "Since this marriage is in opposition to my well-known wishes" (she wrote) "you will hardly expect me to be present. I have seen one member of my family sacrificed to a romantic attachment, and I cannot witness a second. I sail on the *Wilhelm der Grosse* June 4th."

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow!" McLain had said when this was read to him, and Jean, with dimpling cheek and laughing eyes, had rebuked him.

Undeniably it had been a boon to the family to have Aunt Josephine delving into art catalogues instead of family affairs this particular summer, as things had turned out,—for nothing was too sacred for her touch, and no subterfuge availed.

Jean had said to Archer as they sat together that last night before he went away, "I certainly am glad Aunt Josephine is safe in Paris."

"'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb!' he had replied with a flash of his old-time humour.

She had written to Aunt Josephine the next day, telling her that the marriage had been postponed; and Mrs. Alexander, receiving this letter in Paris, had taken heart of grace and said to herself that she would break this thing up yet. She wrote a letter to Jean at once, asking her to come over by the next available steamer and meet her in London. She would defray all expenses, etc., etc.

"Would you like to go, my daughter?" asked Dr. Dabney, doubtfully.

"No, father! No!" Jean had said.

Nothing more was said about it. To him, as to her, Aunt Josephine would be intolerable.

But Aunt Josephine must be faced, intolerable though she might be; for her summer tour was over now and she was coming up to Tinkling Spring. She would be there for Thanksgiving, and would take Jean home with her for the winter.

"Father," said Jean the day after this letter came,—she was on the arm of his chair now and her arms around him in the old way,—"I can't meet Aunt Josephine—yet. I don't dare to risk it. She would worm it out of me about Archer. You know how inquisitive she is, and how persistent. May I go to Chicago?"

"Chicago, my child? To whom would you go in Chicago?"

Jean held out a letter. "It is from Mrs. Nellis. You know I have corresponded with her from time to time ever since the wreck. She wants me to come to Chicago."

"To visit her?"

"Partly, and partly for something more serious. I had written to her of my wedding, and then afterwards had to write and tell her it had been postponed. Of course I could do that with her without giving any reason for it. The worst thing about relatives is that you must give reasons. Well, she is writing to me now to come on there and work with her among the poor. You know she does a great deal of that kind of thing."

"Didn't she make some such proposition as this last winter?" asked Dr. Dabney, after some questions as to the nature of the work. "It seems to me I remember something of the kind."

"Yes, she did; but I didn't want to go then."

"As I remember it you rather ridiculed this kind of philanthropy, did you not?"

"Not exactly. I don't think I ridiculed it, father, but I did say that I didn't believe there was all the sorrow in the world that older people say there is. And I wrote

to Mrs. Nellis that I didn't think I was the kind of person to work among the poor and wretched."

"Well?" he questioned, gently.

"I think I'm qualified now," she said, her chin quivering.

He drew her to him.

"My little girl! . . . My little Jean!"

Dr. Dabney was easily persuaded. He knew Mrs. Nellis for a philanthropic Christian woman whose heart never ran away with her head. She was one with whom Jean would be safe; and he knew enough of the human heart to know that work of this kind just at this time would do the girl great good.

Before Mrs. Alexander's descent upon the family Jean was duly settled in her new occupation. And now the letters might be posted in any letter box, safe from curious neighbourhood eyes.

XXIX

"NO. 1066"

IN the Utah prison the leaden hours crept on. Day followed night, and to toil succeeded rest. This was the variation that life there afforded for six days out of seven. Then came the beneficent Creator's day of rest—and one more week was checked off. But the next was like unto it.

To rise at the peremptory clang of a gong that spared none—this was the life—to march, to eat, to work;—to march, to eat, to work;—to march, to eat, . . . and then—ah! *then* came

"The gentle sleep from Heaven that slid into his soul."

Coming back to this machine-like monotony which held them all in its grip,—a monotone of existence which he had risked life and limb to escape,—rising up at the behest of another,—sitting down to coarse food at which his appetite revolted, with uncouth men who bolted it in noisy silence, and with sickening suspirations,—held down to labour which profited him nothing and led him no whither, like the steps of the horse in the treadmill,—and when it was over for one more day locked in a cell where, as in Bonnivard's, was

"But silence, and a stirless breath,——"

McLain wondered sometimes why he had done it.

True, it had secured freedom for Mulnix. The convict's pardon was easily obtained, and he had gone forth without so much as a word for the man whose sacrifice had made it possible. McLain only smiled when he

heard of it. He had not done it for thanks, he told himself. . . . Well, for what had he done it? He had ruined his own life, certainly, and, what was far worse, he had ruined Jean's. Life might be made endurable for her, might after a while come to have a certain sober satisfaction and middle-aged content, but it could never be the joyous thing it had been.

Why had he done it? He pondered this question dispassionately in his hours of work and his hours of rest, when locked in his cell he was free to read or write or engage himself as he chose until the lights went out and to think unrestrictedly thereafter.

The answer to it did not come except as it forced itself upon him in the deepening conviction that he could not have done otherwise. He was conscious that his attitude toward this life was different from what it had been when he was here before. Then, his whole being was in rebellion,—his mental position that of one who beats at the bars he cannot break. He felt so keenly at that time, so bitterly and intensely, the injustice of his punishment and the ignominy of his disgrace. Now —while these feelings were undiminished—his years of absence from the prison and the saner way of looking at things he had somehow gained enabled him to adjust himself to it; and with adjustment always comes partial relief. He had broken the law, in letter if not in spirit, and the punishment, which he believed still to be unjust, had at least been lawfully meted out to him. It remained for him, he perceived, to bear it as a man should, —not sullenly, nor morosely, but courageously.

Especially was this true since he had voluntarily returned to it. Whatever was the compelling force that had brought him back, certainly there was no outside compulsion. Had he so chosen he might at this very moment when he lay gasping for breath in a sweltering cell, be ploughing the ocean with danger left behind him and the salt sea air pouring in upon him from the port-

hole. Ah-h! How blessed that would be! . . . Why hadn't he chosen that?

He never forced himself to a categorical answer to this question. Had he done so, it would have been something like this: he had come back as the lesser of two evils—the greater being freedom purchased at the price of his soul's integrity.

Then his thoughts would go back inevitably to what might have been. Had he resisted this unseen power that brought him here—whatever it was—he might be at this moment lying in the blue and gold chamber and she slumbering beside him, not knowing and *never to know* that he was aught but what she thought him. He could have kept it from her forever. It would not have been such a difficult thing! . . . That room formed itself in a mental picture before his eyes staring into the blackness about him. . . . How sweet and pure it was!—just like herself! . . . And with its four big windows, how cool!—even in a breathless night like this! If only he could get one full breath of the air that blew through his oak trees! One whiff from the sweet honeysuckle! . . . Why did people think so little of these things when they had them to enjoy? he wondered. He had never thought much about air and sweet odours—he had taken them as a matter of course, like everybody else. But now—Bah! how foul the air was! It pressed upon him like a hand that shut off his breath!

He fell to planning a cell-house that should have sunlight and ventilation. Why shouldn't even a prison have these two things? They were God's gift to the world—His agents for preventing disease and crime. Why should they be withheld from even the wretched and depraved? Was it as retaliation for the crimes they had committed? Was a State still retaliatory? If so, why had it abandoned other forms of torture?

No, it was not that the State meant to be cruel. It

was because it was cheaper to build prisons on this plan. They must be constructed so as to accommodate the great numbers being pressed into them. . . . But why, he asked himself whimsically, had it not occurred to them to try cutting off the supply? He had thought and read much on this subject in the years that intervened since he was here before. He knew now how criminals were being manufactured in antiquated jails faster than they could be cared for in up-to-date prisons. . . . Yes, if the supply could be cut off, or the ranks thinned out by discharging those in whom punishment had done its work (provided it really was *not* meant to be retaliatory)—why, then they would be able to build prisons so that all the poor devils could get a breath of air around! . . . Whew-w! it was hot! . . . was evil to be sweated out of their souls as rheumatism was sweated out of their bodies?

Then upon his tossings and gaspings and feverish imaginings sleep would descend before he had thought it out.

It was not alone the matter of mental adjustment that made McLain's position easier than before. The attention of the prison authorities was naturally drawn to him by his voluntary return to custody, and while he made no bid for sympathy, sympathy of a practical kind was forthcoming. He was shown as much consideration as the rules of the prison and the maintenance of discipline would permit. When the librarian was discharged, McLain was put in his place. He set himself to recataloguing and renovating the books, and devising a scheme by which the magazines, many of them private property, were exchanged and circulated through the medium of the library. He brought to his work an intelligence and a knowledge of books that made him a valuable assistant, and the same constructive force that had been employed in remaking his farm was displayed in remodelling the prison book supply.

How long he was to be here he did not yet know. His original sentence would terminate the following March, but how much would be added for his escape was indeterminate. McLain found an indeterminate sentence a nerve-racking thing. But—it could not be forever, and he set himself to do his best and make it as short as possible. In the meantime, what his hands found to do he would do—to pass away time, if nothing more.

They found employment first in the night school, where from supper time till half-past eight he became an instructor. He might have been reading; he wondered sometimes why he wasn't. Perhaps it was because he remembered Dr. Dabney's telling him that he had a gift for imparting to others what he knew, and Dr. Llewellyn's adding that he had the rarer power of stimulating within them a desire to know. . . . Well, he told himself impatiently, if he had a gift, in Heaven's name let him use it when opportunity came!

Jean's letter he always wrote on Sunday after the service in the chapel. He always went to this, whether the sermon was by Jew, Gentile, or Latter Day Saint, because it was something to break the tedious monotony of the week. He liked to be able to give Jean the text, for he knew it would please her. Then it was something to write about. It seems strange that there should ever be a lack of subjects between them, but McLain, who penned burning epistles to her in which he poured out his heart (and never sent), adhered to his determination to write only friendly letters to the girl. It was a cruel test of her love, but if it should hold out, it would be worth the test. If it shouldn't hold out—— He never got any farther in it than that.

Down in the ravine Jean cried over his letters because they were cold and impassionate, and never knew of those he wrote and did not send. Is it to be wondered at that her own grew more reserved as time went by?

It is hard for the love-making to be all on one side—especially on the girl's.

One day in the fall—it was a month after the chrysanthemum "from our garden" came—a leaf fell from her letter as he opened it. It was pinned to a slip of paper on which was written, "From one of your own oaks."

He sat looking at it a long time before he read the letter. . . . "From *your* oak." . . . She had said "*our* chrysanthemum." But when he read the letter there was nothing he could criticise.

He did not write often to Mrs. Debo or Judge Haliday, for every letter to them was one taken from Jean, and he felt a consuming desire to keep in close touch with her in spite of the formality of his letters. He thought of his protestations to her the day they parted that he would not accept her sacrifice, and knew it was false. . . . If Jean should fail him, where would he turn? . . . And there was no way to hold her save by keeping himself before her, pitiable object though he were! That week in spite of his resolution a little more of his heart got into his letter, though he had not meant to let it. He was holding on desperately to his determination to leave her uninfluenced by any thought of a future with him. But it was hard to do it, for in one of Mrs. Debo's infrequent letters had been this postscript:

"We've got a doctor since you left—Dr. Gresham—the one you seen in the choir that day. He sings there regular now."

So Gresham was there! Gresham would have the opportunities that once were his! . . . Could that have anything to do with her change of pronouns? He hunted up the chrysanthemum letter. . . . Why should she have said *our* in one letter and *your* in the other?

She wrote to him about her plans for going to Chicago, and he entirely approved—for obvious reasons. When she was settled there she wrote to him not of her work,

which was of rather a sorrowful kind and not inspiriting to hear about—but of the things she was seeing and the people she met. Dr. and Mrs. Nellis had a lovely home and such charming friends. They were without children and devoted much of their time to the poor. Mrs. Nellis had a younger brother, Dr. Bayne, who made his home with her. He was very intelligent, very much interested in sociological studies, and was of great assistance to them in their work. ("Another doctor!" thought McLain. "My cup certainly runneth over with the medical fraternity!") Whenever her work took her into objectionable parts of the city, as it did sometimes, he always insisted upon going with her as a protector; so he (McLain) might feel perfectly easy about her. Indeed, he must not think of her as being in the poor districts all the time. As a matter of fact, after that letter he did not think of her as in the poor districts at all. He thought of her as walking with Bayne, singing with Bayne, talking with Bayne—and looking to him as her protector. . . . He wished she had stayed in Tinkling Spring.

Through the early winter Jean's letter still came each week with clock-like regularity. Sunday morning he received it and Sunday afternoon it was answered. Then he counted the hours till another Sunday would roll around. While the letters were always bright and cheery, he could not shut his eyes, as the months went by, to the fact that they were more impersonal, more detached as it were. Perhaps that might be because she was now where they had no common interest. What did he care for the brick and mortar of Chicago, or even its parks that she wrote about? Yet he thought of the pictures she suggested day and night. She had told him once that Dr. Bayne had a motor car, and he had had visions ever since of the two speeding along the North Shore Drive, or out in Jackson Park. Why did she ever write him that? he thought, irritably.

One Sunday in December his letter failed, and his courage with it. It came later in the week, but there was something strangely unsatisfactory about it, something forced about the light way in which she wrote, as if she were compelling herself to pen words she did not feel. McLain felt a fear gnawing at his heart that he would not formulate.

The next Sunday again there was none. He could not expect one then, he told himself, since the last had not come until Thursday. They were thrown off their regular schedule and she was trying to get back to it. Sure enough, on the Sunday following the letter came, and in the quiet of his cell he opened it. It was very short, saying only that she wrote to-night so that she would feel sure of his hearing Sunday as usual. (That was it, he told himself. He had said that was what it was. She only wanted to get back upon the old schedule.) He felt a ridiculous sense of relief. . . . She had been—what was that word? sick?—no, busy?—yes, that was it. It was indistinct as if it had been erased and rewritten. The whole letter was unlike her. It was written with pencil, even to the address—a thing he had never known her to do. He shook his head, not knowing that he did so, as he folded it up. . . . She *would* be busy, of course.

He sat with his eyes on the floor for a long, long time after reading that letter. . . . He ought to give up all thought of it! If he were a man he would write to her and break it off.

But he did not do it.

That was the last letter he had from her, and that was the third of January.

During the next two months McLain suffered the torments of the lost. He could not doubt what her silence meant, and he could not blame her. She had done only what he had told her she was at liberty to do at any time—what she ought to do in justice to herself. She

had simply taken him at his word. And he, poor besotted fool that he was, had made no effort to keep her! How could he expect a woman to keep her troth with a man who did not even tell her of his love? Why had he not sent her such letters as he had written and put away? They would have told her in words she could not have misunderstood how his heart, his life, were bound up in her! But the cold, formal things he had sent her in return for hers with their full measure of love, pressed down and running over! . . . Oh, fool! fool—how could he expect to hold her with such clammy fingers as that!

When his self-abasement and scorn had spent themselves he determined that he would not give it up without a struggle. He would write to her again—would tell her all he had wanted to tell her through these long months—and see if he could not woo her back to him after all. He wrote the letter and sent it to Chicago. Then he shut his teeth and waited.

There was no answer.

He wrote again, putting in the left hand corner: "If not called for in five days return to Box —, Salt Lake."

It came back.

He tore it up and wrote another—an impassioned appeal in which his pride was thrown to the winds. Would she not at least write and tell him if all was over? This he directed to Tinkling Spring, with the instruction "Please forward." He never heard from it. Then he settled himself to dull despair.

It was the first week in March that he was called one day to the warden's office. He knew that Calvin Judd was interesting himself in trying to secure a pardon for him, or rather a remission of the penalty for his escape. Without that added penalty his term would be out in seven days. He imagined it was about this that he was to be interviewed. But freedom to him

now was not what it would have been three months ago!

As he expected, Mr. Judd was in the office in consultation with the warden. He looked up and nodded.

"Hello, McLain!"

"How are you, Judd?"

"We'll be ready for you in a minute." Mr. Judd held up a paper significantly; but McLain made no sign. He stood with his back to them looking out of the office window. The warden turned to the deputy.

"Give him that package that came this morning. We'll be through in a minute."

The deputy went to the receptacle for such things and took out a small box whose wrapping, loosely tied up after having been opened, bore the address of Mr. John Branham. The postmark was Tinkling Spring, and it was addressed in Jean's writing.

McLain opened it with fiercely pounding heart. Inside, some crumpled paper steadied another and smaller box. *It was a ring case of red morocco.*

Then the soul of Archer McLain died within him!

The deputy who had given him the box came back to him.

"It ain't all of us gets rings!" he said, with a clumsy attempt to be facetious. Then, receiving no answer and looking into McLain's face, "Say! are you sick? . . . Set down, man!"

McLain obeyed mechanically and the deputy got him a glass of water, saying to the warden, who looked up enquiringly:

"Sick. Some of these fellows will drop in their tracks before they'll own up."

"Leave him alone a little while and he'll get over it. Now, as I was saying, Mr. Judd——"

Their voices receded from McLain's consciousness. The sound of many waters was in his ears. . . . And this was what it meant! This was the end. . . .

Well! . . . There was a long pause then, even in his thinking. . . . He had told her to do it! The porch at The Manse swam before his eyes with themselves on the steps—his arm holding her tight—her head on his shoulder—and she promising to be true! . . . She had tried to be—she had tried faithfully . . . but poor little girl! it was too much for her! . . . Yes, he had told her to do it. He hadn't one word to say. He had told her when the time came that she wanted to be free she had only to send him this ring—without a word—and he would understand. . . . Well—he did! . . . And so far as she was concerned, it was all right. As for himself—a hand gripped his throat; his lips were dry. . . . Good God!—a pardon—and nothing to go back to!

"What's the matter with that man?" said the warden in an undertone.

"I'll revive him," said Mr. Judd, "by your permission."

He stepped up to him.

"The pardon is here, McLain. I ought to have told you at once."

McLain turned a dazed face toward him.

"The pardon?—Yes. I certainly am obliged to you, Judd. You—you've been more than kind——"

"Cut it out!" said Mr. Judd, curtly. Then, drawing a chair close to him, "What's the matter, boy?"

McLain opened his hand upon the ring box—looked at it—and then at Calvin Judd. He had few secrets from the ex-sheriff. The man had been his confidant of necessity.

"This is the end, Judd."

"*What?*"

"She was to send it back to me—when she got tired," he said in a lifeless voice.

A comprehension of his meaning broke upon Calvin Judd.

"By George! . . . that's tough!"

There was silence between them then, for no words seemed pertinent. Those that rose to the ex-sheriff's lips were: "That's the way women are!" But he forbore.

The deputy sauntered up. The receiving of a ring by a young man must be an occasion of rejoicing and he wished to have part.

"Say! what do them letters mean, if I ain't too inquisitive?"

McLain looked blank.

"In the ring, you know. Why, you haven't opened it yet!"

McLain touched the pearl spring and the cover flew up. Imbedded in the white satin cushion was a man's seal ring, with an amethyst deeply inset. Inside was the date *Dec. 25,* the year, and a single word.

"'MIZPEH,'" he read. "'*Mizpeh!*'" Then he lifted an illumined face to the deputy. "It means—'The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.'"

"Oh," said the deputy, "I thought it was some sort of pass word, maybe."

Calvin Judd stared. Then he caught McLain's hand and wrung it until the deputy thought he was losing his mind.

"Bully for Jean!" he cried. "Bully for Jean! There's one woman in the world that sticks, anyway!"

And a man's tears, of which they did not need to be ashamed, ran down the cheeks of both.

As McLain was leaving the office he was handed a letter, which he read in the library. It ran:

"Mr. John Branham, Salt Lake City, Utah.

"*Deer sir:*—I take my pen in hand to in foam you that Miss Jean Dabney has about a even chanst now fur life, and I hope these few lines will find you enjoyin' the

same blessing. She has been down for about two months with typhoid, which you know ef you know anything about fevers, that it ain't no joak to have typhoid. Fur myself I'd ruther have smallpox—pits and all.

"Dr. Dabney, which he is her father, has had it too,—caught it from her. I and Miss Lavinia and little Ephrum the nigger has had our hands full, I can tell you. Dr. Dabney is still on soft feed, though he is settin' up, but Jean ain't, nor won't fur *one* while.

"They don't think she taken it around here, for things is as clean as a biscuit board on this place—cleaner'n some, I reckon. She taken a notion to go to Chicago slummin'. I don't know rightly what that is, but Dr. Llewellyn says it's pokin round in the dregs and stirring up germs, and before she could fasten herself onto them they fastened theyselves onto her, and got the onder holt, and that will be the end of her slummin' fur a right smart while, which I fur one am glad of it, fur I think it is a woman's spear to stir up cake and strife and things she is accustomed to at home, instead of germs in foreign cities.

"I sent you a little box yestiddy that she says she done up fur you before she taken sick. And she says tell you she is *just the same.* But it ain't so! She's better—but she's powerful weak.

"So no more at preasant from your obediant servent,

"DRUSILLA DEBO.

"P.S. which I am her nurse."

McLain could have wept for joy at this jumble of news and characteristic personal opinion. . . . She was alive! She was going to live! And she was *just the same!* . . . What a message to come to a man in despair! . . . How could he ever have doubted her—his true-hearted Jean?

And in seven days he would be free!

XXX

WITHOUT BELLS

IN the sweet, cool bed-chamber with the ivy-covered walls upon which two years before Archer McLain had opened his eyes, lay the wraith of a woman. So motionless was she as she lay among the snowy pillows, so wax-like her face, so transparent the blue-veined lids shut over tired eyes that she might well have been thought by anybody but the angular woman now regarding her to be clothed for her last sleep.

It was Jean Dabney.

The long hair, which Mrs. Debo's unremitting care had saved, was braided in two braids and lay on each side of her neck. The nurse had tied bows of blue on the ends which fell across a dainty nightgown run with ribbons of the same hue.

"There, now! you look jest as sweet as you useter when you was a baby and I got you dressed and laid in your little basket with the lace and ruffles on it—only when you was a *blush* rosebud, and now you are a white one. But never mind, honey, the pink will come after a while. Now, when you're rested I'll call the doctor up."

The tired lids shut out the light again, but they opened in a minute.

"Mrs. Debo, is anybody here?"

"Yes, the doctor."

"I thought I heard somebody come last night."

"Maybe you dreamed it," said Mrs. Debo, mendaciously. It was her part to prepare the stage, not to usher in the actors.

"Perhaps so," with a sigh. "I dream so much."

They had had a hard fight for her since that day last January when the message came that she was stricken with the fever. Mrs. Nellis at the long distance phone gave the dread news and asked for instructions. She should advise the hospital.

It happened that Dr. Llewellyn was at The Manse when the message came. He always dropped in as he passed now. Dr. Dabney at the telephone turned to him for agitated consultation while the wire was held, saying brokenly: "No, no! I could not see her go to a hospital! I must have her here." He had the country man's prejudice against the city institution.

Dr. Llewellyn took the receiver from his shaking grasp, and the case into his own hands.

"Hello! . . . I will be there to-morrow morning on the 6:30 train—C. and A.—with a nurse. Have her ready to start home by the next train. . . . No, I haven't a time-table. You must find out there. . . . Yes. . . . Yes, I see. But he doesn't feel that way. . . . No, this is Dr. Llewellyn. Tell her so, please. (Anything else you want to say, doctor?) . . . That's all, thank you. Good-bye."

"I will go over now for Mrs. Debo," he had said. "We will start on the night train."

They brought her home, these two faithful friends, and for months she had lain impassive, scarcely more than breathing, dead to the world about her, almost slipping over the brink again and again but always drawn back—living, in short, the death in life of typhoid.

Consciousness had not quite failed her when she came. She knew them when she was roused, and there was evidently something on her mind. She tried to tell them but darkness would come before the message was delivered.

"She wants something," Mrs. Debo told Dr. Llewellyn; "but I can't make out what it is. She will look up

at me with them great eyes of hern and say, so pitiful, '*Please* send it!' and before I can find out what it is the vacant look will come again and I'll see the curtain's down!"

"It is the fever," he said. "Delirium is wonderfully like insanity."

One night just before she sank into that last death-like stupor Jean called Mrs. Debo to her in the rational tone delirious people use to deceive us. It seemed to the nurse that she certainly was conscious this time.

"Is the light burning—over there?"

To humour her Mrs. Debo went to the window. "No, honey, there ain't any light."

"Then he's dead," said Jean, quietly.

The slow fever burned itself out at last, and she woke one day as an infant wakes—dimly conscious, but without strength or volition. When she came to full consciousness and knew how long she had been lying here and that her father too was ill they could hardly understand her agitation.

"He is out of danger," she was told.

"But I must see father," she pleaded, again and again.

One day after she had been once more denied, she said, imperiously, "Mrs. Debo, look in my trunk and bring me a box that you will find there"—describing it.

"Now, Jean Dabney, I begin to have hopes," Mrs. Debo said. "When anybody speaks that positive they ain't goin' to die right off!"

"I have never intended to die," said Jean.

She took from the box a small parcel addressed for mailing. "Send this to the office—by Sandy. Have him register it."

"I'll send it by Dr. Llewellyn to-night."

"No—by Sandy."

"She don't 'pear to be no ways shaky in her own

mind," inwardly commented Mrs. Debo. "Good sign!" Aloud she remarked, "This was what was botherin' you, I suppose."

Jean looked up quickly. "Did I talk much?"

"Not quite as much as I would have liked. You always stopped before you got to the p'int. You had this on your mind; but we couldn't make head or tail of what you wanted."

Over the girl's lips passed a flicker of relief.

The next day she had the letter written.

When Jean was rested Dr. Llewellyn came in.

"How is the lady to-day, Mrs. Debo?"

"She's pretty peart this morning."

"Pretty peart, eh?" He was acquainted with the vernacular and comprehended. He had once known a night nurse at the Asylum (before the days of fever thermometers) to leave this written report: "I think she's better. Her hide ain't so hot."

He passed a few words with Jean and then said, his fingers on her pulse, "You look as if you were dressed for company this morning. . . . Would you feel like seeing anybody?"

"Is anybody here?"

"Yes. Somebody that is very anxious to see you."

"Is it——"

He saw that nothing would be gained now by temporizing.

"Yes, it's McLain. . . . But there! there!—you can't see him if you let your pulse jump up and down like this! . . . Give me a little of that wine, Mrs. Debo. . . . Pretty weak yet, aren't you?" Then talking to give her time to recover, "You see, he came last night, but your father very properly decided not to let him see you until morning. That gave him an opportunity for a good talk with him himself, I judge, and you will have to put up with third or fourth, or somewhere

along there. . . . Do you think you are equal to it now? . . . All right, girlie!" And he patted her thin hand.

"McLain!" he called from the head of the stairs, "you may come now."

Jean heard the familiar step on the stairs, through the hall, upon the threshold. It was hard to keep her pulse even.

"Mrs. Debo," the doctor said, "I want to speak to you a moment."

As McLain passed him he cautioned, "She is very weak. Don't forget it!"

Then the man passed in and she held out her arms to him.

"Jean," he said softly after a while—he was on his knees beside her—"your prodigal has come home."

"And I couldn't run to meet you—as I promised I would."

"No," he said, significantly, "but your father did!"

"Did he? Oh, Archer, did he? . . . *Dear* father!"—and then after a silence in which much was spoken—"*dear* father!"

"I wonder how he happened to come on here just at the right time," said Dr. Llewellyn to Mrs. Debo as the two went downstairs together.

"I wrote for him."

"You wrote for him?"

"Yes. I thought it was time somebody was takin' it in hand, and there 'peared to be nobody ready to do it. So three or four days ago I wrote to him in New York and told him that in my judgment there wan't nothin' that would cure her now but seein' him."

"Drusilla,"—impressively,—"you deserve to be canonized!"

"I don't know why!" she said, indignantly. "It will bring them together. You see if it don't! Besides,

if I am ever shot for anything it will be for a fool—not a coward!"

"It will never be for either, Drusilla. You are *all right!*"

Joy doeth good like a medicine, we have good authority for thinking. From the hour of McLain's return fresh life flowed through the girl's torpid being. But it takes less time to get down into the Valley of the Shadow of Death than to come up out of it. It would be a long time yet, Dr. Llewellyn told them, before she would be well. Then McLain went to Dr. Dabney and pleaded that they might be married at once.

"I want to nurse her back to life myself," he said, "and I can do it better if she is my wife."

Dr. Llewellyn sided with him, as did Miss Lavinia, to whom marriage by a sick bed was the most romantic thing in life. But it was Jean's voice that decided it.

So, one morning, robed in her prettiest nightgown, with her lover kneeling by her; her father sitting on the side of her bed because he was too weak to stand; with the doctor, the nurse, and Aunt Lavinia (crying softly) gathered at the foot of the bed; and the coloured contingent at the door—Jean Dabney took the vows that made her Archer McLain's wife.

"Let us pray," said Dr. Dabney, and he knelt beside the young man as he had done that day on the porch. That time was in the thoughts of both and of the girl as well. Her free hand sought her father's; and as she lay thus, with one hand in his and the other in her husband's, she was the bond that would forever hold them together.

They had all been warned against excitement, and as they rose Dr. Dabney said only, wringing McLain's hand:

"God bless you—*my son!*"

And from under the bride's closed lids rolled down two happy tears. Then they went out quietly and left them to each other.

She could not be married by her mother's ceremony that she loved—she was too weak for that. "But prob'ly this will stick just as well," said Mrs. Debo, and doubtless she was right, for it had been entered into "reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God," which is more than the form or the book.

The ring she had—the same that had been fitted to her plump finger of last year. It had to be tied on now with ribbon around her wrist, like a baby's ring, for she would not let it leave her hand.

Through the beautiful spring days with their wealth of blossom and springing life, he nursed her back to health.

It was the communion that lies in sympathetic silence that was theirs at first; just the happiness of being together, without need of words. He would leave her sleeping sometimes and go to the open window and take a long, full breath of the spring air, so full of the odour of green things growing, and look off at the budding tress with their varying spring tints, thinking what a beautiful world it was—when one's eyes were opened to see it.

When she was able he would take her in his strong arms and carry her downstairs and out upon the porch where they had sat two years ago, and put her in the invalid's chair that had been his, and bundle her up in shawls and comforters and call them steamer rugs, and put his cap on her for a steamer cap, and read to her about the things they would see when the voyage was over. The voyage was what he called her convalescence.

It was on the porch, where Jean and not himself was the centre of interest, that he met his neighbours, one by one.

He had dreaded this, but with Jean there and the conversation naturally turning in her direction it was managed without his becoming the figure in the foreground

that his fears had made him. The story of Mrs. Debo's part in bringing them together was oft repeated and never doubted, for Drusilla's reputation for truth was established in that neighbourhood. It added to her already excellent reputation as a woman of resource and courage. When Jean was able to travel he took her abroad, and under Italy's blue skies and beside Como's bluer waters he and nature wooed her back to health and happiness.

XXXI

GOD'S BEST GIFT—WORK

ARE the wedding ring and the wedding journey the end of all for faithful lovers?

Nay, verily!

They are but the fanfare that ushers in the real drama. That, for most of us, is neither a glitter of gold nor a succession of novel sights and sounds; but a sober play, with a mingling of comedy and tragedy; of lofty emotional flights here and there, with long stretches of commonplace in between; and endless rehearsing that must be done with no inspiring vision of the footlights before our eyes. Few of us play to crowded houses; but the drama is a noble one in spite of that,—and it is worth our best endeavour.

To Jean and Archer McLain it began when the blissful wedding journey was over;—with its loiterings in pleasant places, its dropping into bypaths and emerging upon the highways of travel; its threading of the way through picture gallery and cathedral aisles and show palaces to come out again into the open of a day on the Rhine or a coach trip through England. To the girl it was all pure delight; and to the man, something deeper. He would have prolonged it if he could. His heart beat a funeral march as he bought tickets for the return. But Dr. Dabney was not well, and Jean herself was beginning to feel that she wanted the quiet of her own home.

Over there they had not talked much of the past, nor of the future. They put both from them and lived in the present. But with the vessel's prow set to the west

and the great pulsing engine bringing them each moment nearer to their "ain countree," it was inevitable that their thoughts should centre more and more upon the life before them and its dangers.

"Archer, do you dread it?" she asked him one day as they stood watching the white spray flung from the prow of the advancing vessel.

"Yes. It isn't worth while to try to deceive you, Jean. I dread it. . . . I should like to have stayed in England for the rest of the time. . . . But we can't do it, so there is use thinking of it. I couldn't ask you to do it—and I know it would be useless if I did. The same loyalty that made you stand by me will make you stand by your father, now that he is old and broken. And—I cannot forget what has aged him."

"No," she said, "I couldn't leave father."

"And we would neither of us be willing to even make the attempt to uproot him. He would not live a year if his work and his people were taken away from him."

"No," she said again, "his life is in Tinkling Spring. His body might go with us, but his soul would be there."

"Then in Tinkling Spring we will stay. Now that much is settled."

There was a long pause. Then she said, timidly, "Archer, do you suppose there is so very much danger —of——"

He drew a quick, long breath.

"Oh-h—it will come out some day, I suppose. These things almost always do. Perhaps that is a part of the punishment. . . . But we will not embitter our lives, Jean, by a continual dread of it. I have spent a good many years that way and I am never going to spend another! . . . I have done what I can to make reparation. I have paid! and now I am going to put the thing behind me. We will get all the joy out of life we can—we are entitled to that. And we will do what lies

in our power to bring the joy of life to some other poor devil. That we owe—or I do."

"And what you owe, I shall help pay," she said.

"I'll never find you lacking, Jean! I've tested that—and it is almost worth to me what the knowledge has cost. . . . No,—we will do the best we can—and if it comes——"

"We will meet it together," she finished.

It was in this spirit that they took up their lives.

A scorching heat such as they had passed through shrivels up much of the lightness and brightness of lives, as of trees, but when the sap still flows and they are strongly rooted both spring to life in time.

After the pleasant home-coming and the meeting with old friends, Jean was soon absorbed in the novel task of making and ordering her own home, which is a matter of deepest interest to all normal-minded women. McLain fell to work with zest upon his farm, searching out new and scientific methods of pursuing agriculture, to the irritation of some of his neighbours. He and Colonel Judd had many a good-natured quarrel over the "book-farming" he was trying to introduce.

They entered easily and naturally into the life of the community, social, industrial, and otherwise; and everybody was glad that the misunderstanding between them —whatever it was—had been so happily ended by Mrs. Debo's timely assistance.

"No wonder they think a heap of her," said Goose Creek, which felt its own importance vaguely enhanced by Drusilla's diplomacy. Which is just as accurate as we generally are in passing judgment on the acts of our neighbours and in finding the hidden springs whence they proceed.

When Jean's baby came, the pride of possession, the joy of fatherhood, in McLain's face was held in check

by another emotion that could have been seen flitting across it sometimes and sometimes not flitting. It was usually when he came upon her unexpectedly and found her looking into the boy's face. The look on his face then was a thing to make an enemy weep. He usually turned away or hid it in some way, but one day Jean saw it and knew it for what it was.

"Archer," she called. She had been giving the boy his bath and had him snuggled up in his flannel blanket just ready for the mystery of robing. She dropped the blanket across her knees and left uncovered the dimpled, quivering form, all legs and arms.

"Kneel down here by me. I have something to tell you." She put her arm around the man's neck and brought her lips close to his ear. . . . "There isn't a mark—of any kind—upon him!" she whispered. *"He's perfect!"*

During the winter after their return McLain had but one man besides Sandy to help him,—a man named McMurtrie. Nobody knew him nor where he came from, but he proved a faithful hand whose only fault was his periodical absences of a day. Though this was with McLain's consent Mrs. Debo bitterly resented it.

"The man's triflin'!" she told McLain.

"Oh, no, he's not. You may take a day off yourself whenever you want it. It does a man good to get away from home sometimes, and a woman too."

She knew he was laughing at her, but McLain, with all his good nature, was the one person of whom she stood in awe.

With the opening season there was need of more help, but it always seemed to be forthcoming. The young farmer did not have the trouble that some of the older ones complained of. While his neighbours were inveighing bitterly against the superior attractions of "the road" for the peripatetic fraternity that sought it from April to November, the young man on the Bas-

com place was seldom without help. It became matter for discussion as time went on.

"He can't keep them though, any longer than we can," remarked one. "He's constantly changing."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Freno; "but did you ever take notice that they never up and leave him durin' harvest or corn-plantin'? No, sir. McLain's hands never leave him in the lurch. Somethin' strange about that!"

"'Tain't strange he changes," said Mr. Coyt, contemptuously. "He don't have nothin' but boys! I told him once he'd have a heap better luck keepin' 'em if he would get older men, that was steadier, but he jes' laughed and says, 'Well, Lige,' he says—he calls me Lige, same as the rest of you do—'boys have to live—while they're *gettin'* steady. I was a boy onct, myself,' he says, 'and somehow I never have quite got over it.'"

"And he never will," put in Mr. Freno. "He's jest a big, good-natured boy now."

"Ye-ep, he's good-natured," admitted Mr. Coyt, "but, shucks! that ain't no way to run a farm!"

McLain's hands were inexperienced, most of them, but they were willing, and they did his work well, for he saw to that himself. He kept a good many men in the summer, and Mrs. Debo's house was pretty full sometimes. On one occasion she, like Mr. Coyt, went to him with advice. These young fellows didn't half know how to work, she told him. Two good farmhands could do as much actual labour as four of them and save the board of the other two. . . . 'Twasn't good management! . . . For her part, she believed there was something wrong with 'em—settin' out to be farmhands! Then, feeling the steadiness of his eye, she admitted that of course it was his business, not hers.

"Mrs. Debo," he said, trusting her, "maybe there is something wrong with them. Did you ever think about there being such a thing in this world as crippled souls—

and lives? . . . And if you knew of any such wouldn't you like to have a hand in straightening them?"

She gave him a startled glance, but asked no questions. From that time on he needed no better helper than Mrs. Debo. He had touched the right string.

McLain treated his men well,—fed them plentifully, housed them in comfort, paid good wages, and exacted good work. He was on friendly terms with them and so was his wife. On Sunday afternoons they were always invited to the library for an hour or so of singing, for Jean conceived that a voice was a gift to be used, and the men were fond of hearing her.

She sang whatever they asked for, and they called for startling things sometimes, as when McMurtrie, who had been a soldier in the Spanish-American war, and was never tired of talking about it, though reticent as to his life since, asked suddenly one Sunday after "Jerusalem the Golden," and "There is a Green Hill Far Away," if she would sing "A Hot Time in the Old Town To-night."

She found the music without the quiver of an eyelid, and together she and McLain sang it, with a swaying motion and a reckless abandon that stirred the sluggish singing blood of the men, and when at the persuasive refrain McLain turned and by an imperative motion of his hands invited their support, they rose as one man, and the volume of sound that broke forth was a wonder to hear, and to no one more than to their own astonished selves.

To the singers it was the infectious rhythm of a rollicking song, but to the man who evoked it and could not sing it was far more. To him it came as the echo of the "God-speed" with which he and his comrades had been cheered on to war.

With the first strain Memory had him back in the close-packed train, about which a crowd of their fellow-townsmen had gathered to do them honour. In his ears

was the blare of the brass band and the volume from hundreds of throats splitting themselves over this song; in his vision was a fluttering of handkerchiefs, a waving of hats, a stretching of boyish heads out of windows to catch last glimpses, and most distinct of all—though in the far background,—a little woman whose handkerchief was not fluttering because it was in other use.

The man rose with the rest at that refrain, but it was to step out on the porch with Jean's baby in his arms. He came back when the song was over, and they were still looking at each other in amused embarrassment that they should have so far forgotten themselves, and remarked to the man nearest the door that it was too much of a head-splitter for a fellow that didn't sing. And when he brought her baby back to her, Jean—seeing the human look in the eyes that had always avoided hers—wondered if after all "A Hot Time in the Old Town" hadn't been "sacred" music.

Then they sang "Home, Sweet Home," which was what they always closed with, and when it came to the chorus McLain turned to them again with a gesture of invitation, and again they took it up, but this time softly and with eyes that scrupulously avoided everything and everybody except the baby, who was passed from one to another as need came. For to men like Archer McLain's hands, unaccustomed as they were to this sort of thing, a woman's voice, a baby's touch, and a song of home, was a moving combination.

Then when the singing was over, simple, homely refreshments were passed by Jean and Sandy, who took unstinted pleasure in his office of helper,—doughnuts and cider, or apples and nuts, walnuts, hickory nuts, and hazel nuts from the farm,—sometimes in their season paw-paws or wild cherries brought in by the men, and when November's frosts had robbed them of their "pucker," persimmons from the tree down in the pasture, or wild grapes that climbed up out of reach of

anybody but able-bodied young men, eager to do something hard. Jean called on them freely to help in the preparation for this Sunday afternoon feast, and there was never a man among them that was not proud and happy to be her helper.

At those gatherings there was never anything didactic. The hands were given only music, human companionship, and—the baby. John Archer, Jr., held the centre of the stage, for a child is safe ground and his doings and sayings may be exploited by any without risk of embarrassment or fear of trenching on dangerous ground. Farmhands are often awkward and ill at ease. McLain's were. And yet, though attendance was in no sense compulsory, nobody stayed away. If ever "At Homes" are a success, Jean had a right to feel that hers were.

They were not religious men. Dr. Dabney's church had no attractions for them, nor was there any attempt to influence them in this direction. But when Archer McLain's sitting-room was opened to them and their attendance asked by the gracious mistress of it, they came as one man. They were met as men, treated as men, and involuntarily they stretched themselves up to the stature of men. Perhaps the making themselves fit for friendly intercourse with a good woman in her own refined home was to them a religious act. Who can say?

McMurtrie left them after a while. He had some time ago abandoned his periodical absences and settled down on the farm to stay. He had a talk with McLain soon after the singing of "A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight," and the result of it was that McLain went over to Colonel Judd, who had recently lost his negro housekeeper, and laid the man's case before him. McMurtrie had been separated from his wife—not divorced, but separated. He wanted to get her back, but he had nothing to offer her in the way of a home. Wouldn't he like to take the two—the wife as housekeeper, the man

as foreman on his farm? He was a good hand, thoroughly reliable, but—— Then followed some explanations into which it is not necessary for us to go. At the conclusion Colonel Judd nodded comprehendingly and agreed.

The result of it was that in a short time there came to the neighbourhood a shrinking, subdued looking woman with a child that clung to her and seemed a little afraid of McMurtrie. And McLain lost a capable hand a few days after, and Colonel Judd gained a very competent housekeeper who watched over him as a daughter might. The man made good with Colonel Judd, for he had much at stake.

Meanwhile, as wife, mother, daughter, neighbour, and helper to her husband in all good undertakings Jean was finding her life sweet and full.

One day McLain after a short trip brought back with him a young man to whom her heart went out. He had been ill, which might account for his pallor,—but even that could not explain the hopelessness of his eyes. They took him into their own house, for he was not quite like the other hands. He had been very ill and spent long hours on the south portico as he was directed, but he did not improve rapidly. It seemed almost as if the mainspring were broken.

Jean tried in gentle, unobtrusive ways to gain his confidence, but without much success, until some chance word broke down his restraint and he put his head down on the arm of Grandfather Charlton's old sofa and brokenly told her all about it. He had been engaged, and they were to have been married this summer, but—he had gone wrong—and he couldn't hold her to it—after that.

"No, not unless she wanted it so," Jean said.

He looked up quickly.

"Do you think it would be right to do it—even then?"

"That is a question for her to decide—not you. It may be that she would be happier with you—even yet—than apart from you. It all depends on the strength of her affection."

They had neither of them ever loved anybody else, he said. That was why it was so hard on them.

"Then let her decide it," she said again.

She told McLain the story that night, but he was apathetic, she thought, and she told him no more of John Marner's confidences.

One day, however, after the young man had been there long enough to prove himself, McLain said to his wife:

"Jean, I have a notion of making an investment, and I want your advice. . . . You know that knoll over west that we have always said would make a pretty site for a house? . . . Well, I'm thinking of cutting off forty acres about there for a small farm and putting John Marner on it. He's going to come out all right. I would put up a small cottage on it, supply the stock and farm implements necessary, and either rent it or sell it to him on easy terms. . . . What do you say?"

"Oh, Archer, do it! She wants to come. But they haven't anything to begin on!"

The plan was carried out in time, and they were married in Jean's living-room, going directly to their own little home where everything was in readiness, even to the supper for two which Mrs. Debo had prepared and taken over.

To Dr. Dabney, who had been told nothing of the life history of these two, the conviction slowly came as they stood before him, the man whiter than the girl, that this was no ordinary marriage. Perhaps he had some faint dawning of the truth, for he prayed from the heart that "their feet might be kept from falling, and their eyes from shedding tears." He wiped his glasses thoughtfully when it was all over and the young

couple had been started off with Sandy as driver in McLain's new carriage.

The thought gathered strength as they sat down together, the four of them, to the evening meal at Jean's table, and made him abstracted; and its cumulative force led him to grasp his son-in-law's hand at parting with a trembling, and to Miss Lavinia entirely irrelevant, "God bless you—*my son!*"

When they were all gone Jean and McLain sat in the gloaming before the open fire, Jean with the sleeping babe in her arms. She had a guilty feeling that he ought to be in his little bed, but the lure of the twilight and the firelight held her, and the warm little pulsing body close to her was a part of the comfort.

They sat thus—he in the great leather rocker and she in the little sewing chair with not even a table between them—watching silently the parting asunder of a spent log that lay on Grandfather Charlton's old brass andirons, their gaze riveted upon it as if they saw nothing in all the world but this impending dissolution. But it was not so. The thoughts of both, made strangely tender by the scene they had just witnessed, were upon—not death, but life—upspringing, revivified life; the life of the individual and the life of the world.

It was this larger, more abstract phase that occupied the man's mind as he sat staring into the fire depths. With a broadening outlook and a power of discernment that seldom come except with years or a deep experience, he saw it as a panorama continually unrolling—life in its vastness, its solemnity, its mystery of beginning and end, its tragedy, its wreckage, its despairs. But he was seeing deeper than that. Ah, yes! For his spiritual vision had been cleared, and while there is all of this in life, there is infinitely more—and God be thanked!

Unfolding before his quickened inner sense as he

mused upon it came life's marvellous powers of renewal; its hopes eternally upspringing; its opportunities to regain a measure at least of that which was lost; its sweetness—he closed his eyes at that, listening to Jean's lullaby; its endless possibilities of new aims, and nobler aspirations, and—yes, and accomplishment. For it was possible for a man to accomplish—even a man who had been down into the depths. . . . Not the same aims, perhaps—he half smiled as he thought how trivial the objects that engrossed him now would have seemed to him once;—how puerile those that engaged him once appeared to him now.—No, not the same, certainly, but those that would be as satisfying in the end.

A new and overpowering sense of the stupendousness of life, and the grandeur of it all came over him. It was a glorious thing to have a part in it. All was not lost while there was work in the world to do, and power and place to do it. He could afford to leave the saving of the Nation to others now, and till the one little field of briers that was his. He had made a bare beginning—he was very humble to-night and did not overrate his work—but already he was beginning to see results. . . . It was good to have been able to give the boy a chance! He was eager to prove that he could make good.

By a circuitous route which took in the whole of poor struggling humanity he had at last reached the one concrete case which had filled Jean's mind from the first; for with a woman's quick sympathy and her inborn love of romance, she had been dwelling upon the new home-life starting into being in the little cottage, and the warming of another hearth. When she spoke it seemed like the echo of his own thought, which is one of the joys of silent intimate companionship.

"Archer," she said, softly, "it is like creation. I understand now what it is for a man to be 'a co-worker with God.' You have made life possible for him."

"Yes," he answered, gravely, "I suppose it is so. But

I am only passing it on. Do you know, Jean, . . . do you know——"

The log parted and fell, scattering its ashes. McLain took the tongs and laid the two halves carefully together, stooping then to throw on them a stick of dry hickory that sent a shower of sparks up the chimney's throat. He stood watching it as the tiny flame caught and spread and leaped from point to point,—thinking of that other night and that other flame he had kindled here and the words of bitter anguish he had spoken: "Thus is our hearth fire lighted—and thus it goes out!" . . . God had been very good to him!

He turned then, looking down at her as she sat rocking the boy—his boy—the firelight touching the burnished bronze of her hair into a very halo. To him at that moment they were the Holy Mother and Child, and with a sudden ecstasy of soul he knelt beside her and gathered them both in his arms. But she did not know the flood of emotion that was upon him, and when he looked into the untroubled depths of her eyes, she demanded playfully:

"Do I know—what?"

It was a full minute before he answered her, and when he did his voice had in it a curious mingling of humility and triumph and reverence and awe—with love unspeakable.

"Do you know—who made life possible—for *me,* little girl?"

The haloed head rested against the brown one then, and together they bent over the slumbering boy, their hearts too full for aught but silence.

It was the old combination that is ever new,—the man, the woman, the child—and the hearthstone;—the potent combination that is at once the root and the flower of our Christian civilization and the safety of the State; and though the trail of the serpent had crossed their path and might cross it again,—still it was a better Eden

than that of the Garden, for they had eaten of the tree of knowledge and chosen the good. The curse was turned to blessing; for before them was work, and around them was love.

And the hearth fire leaped and crackled and burned—and the glory of it filled the room.

THE END

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